


2022

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON INCREASING THE NUMBER OF STUDENT VETERANS IN GRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS AT A COMPREHENSIVE MID-SIZED REGIONAL UNIVERSITY

Scott R. Allen
Murray State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Commons](#), [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Gender Equity in Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Indigenous Education Commons](#), and the [Other Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Allen, Scott R., "A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON INCREASING THE NUMBER OF STUDENT VETERANS IN GRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS AT A COMPREHENSIVE MID-SIZED REGIONAL UNIVERSITY" (2022). *Murray State Theses and Dissertations*. 275.
<https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/etd/275>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at Murray State's Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Murray State Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Murray State's Digital Commons. For more information, please contact msu.digitalcommons@murraystate.edu.

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON INCREASING THE NUMBER OF STUDENT
VETERANS IN GRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS AT A
COMPREHENSIVE MID-SIZED REGIONAL UNIVERSITY

by

Scott R. Allen

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The College of Education and Human Services

Department of Educational Studies, Leadership, and Counseling

at Murray State University

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

P-20 & Community Leadership

Specialization: Educational Leadership and Policy Formulation

Under the supervision of Dr. Randal Wilson, Associate Professor

Murray, KY

December 2022

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to take this opportunity to thank every national hero, along with their families, for their unwavering and unselfish service to our nation. I salute all the veterans, past, present, and future. I know from whence you come, and it is indubitable that many have had to pay the ultimate sacrifice. Society owes every veteran the moral imperative to provide them with an education and capture their wisdom, knowledge, and experiences to help those of us who decide to walk in our future footsteps. The long gray line will forever march on to defend our very existence and our precious way of life.

I express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Randal Wilson, my dissertation chair, for believing in me, guiding me, letting me be his protégé, and offering the wisdom to stay the course and make a difference. Dr. Wilson did not fail to provide executive oversight to this non-traditional and triple minority doctoral student amidst all non-parochial approaches to obtaining my EdD. I will forever remember his mentorship, professionalism, and genuine love of learning.

I want to thank the other crucial members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Tim Todd, Provost, Dr. Terence L. Homes, Business Professor, and Dr. Walter Oakley, Rabbi, for their mentoring and guidance. Each played a vital role in completing this research study. These professionals encouraged me to seek a terminal degree as a post-career professional. Thank you for instilling the true mantra that lifelong learning and adding to the body of existing knowledge are supreme life endeavors.

Finally, I would like to thank the participants in this study for their willingness to open up and relay their vast and varied experiences in pursuing higher education despite nearly impossible odds and tremendous difficulties. These student veteran participants are forever

brothers and sisters in arms, battle buddies who depend on each other in these great life endeavors.

Abstract

This phenomenological study examined how a comprehensive mid-sized regional university can attract, retain and graduate more graduate and postgraduate student veterans. This study was framed by a grand tour question, three research questions, and several sub-tiered questions. Data collected from interviews with student veterans pursuing graduate and postgraduate degrees after receiving a baccalaureate are examined. The experiences noted and documented in this study show that the motivation for student veterans to pursue graduate and doctoral degrees is based primarily on data gleaned from personal interviews and data collected from those interviews. The participants stated that the availability of veteran educational benefits and the desire to get promoted or enhance their professional competitiveness was a primary motivator to pursue a graduate degree. Additionally, every student veteran stated that they identify as a veteran first and foremost. And that relying upon and trusting other veterans across the spectrum of their higher educational pursuits helped them complete their respective degree programs. This phenomenological study was not without limitations, and further investigation on the topic is encouraged and recommended.

Keywords: P-20 Education, Student Veteran, Graduate Degree, Minority Group, G.I. Bill, Post 9/11.

Table of Contents

Title Page.....	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abstract	iv
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Purpose of the Study	1
Conceptual Framework	2
Research Questions.....	2
Significance of the Study	3
Assumptions	4
Limitations	4
Delimitations	5
Definitions	5
Summary	7
Chapter II: Literature Review	9
Introduction	9
Currently Available Literature	10
Importance of GI Bill	11
From Military Life to Civilian College Life.....	11
Other Nuances on This Transition	15
Veterans Helping Other Veterans	16
Enrolling and Completing a Degree Program	18
Bridging the Chasm – Resources and Community Building.....	19
The All-Important Diversity.....	21
Global Relevance	23
The Power of Collaboration and Interaction	24
Analysis	29
Summary	33
Chapter III: Methodology	36

Research Design	36
Purpose of the Study	37
Research Questions	38
Description of Participants	38
Description of Sampling Procedures	39
Description of Risks	40
Voluntary Participation, Confidentiality, and Assured Anonymity	42
Procedures for Data Analysis and Integrity	42
Validity and Reliability	42
Coding	43
Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis	44
Chapter IV: Research Findings and Analysis	45
Interview Participants.....	45
Research Questions	49
Graduate School Preparation	51
Motivating Factors for Attending Graduate School	56
Transition to Graduate School	60
Analysis	63
Summary	64
Themes	64
Chapter V: Conclusions and Discussion.....	68
Discussion	68
Conclusion of Research Questions.....	69
Interview Findings.....	70
Summary of Study.....	72
Relationship of Conclusions to Other Research.....	73
Discussion and Inferences from Data.....	74
Practical Implications and Recommendations	75
P-20 Implications	77
Limitations of this study.....	78
Recommendations for Future Research	79
References	81
Appendix A.....	86

Appendix B	87
Appendix C	90
Appendix D	91

List of Tables

Table 1. Kentucky Military Friendly® Schools for 2021-2022.....32

Table 2. Participant Demographic Profiles.....49

List of Figures

Figure 1. Military Friendly® Schools Standards.....32

Chapter I: Introduction

The ancient Chinese philosopher turned General Sun Tzu famously stated, “The art of war is of vital importance to the State. War is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or ruin. Hence, war cannot be neglected under any circumstances” (Sunzi & Minford, 2002). In the book *American Soldier* (Franks, 2004), General Tommy Franks details the efforts of the United States to defeat the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. When one reads General Franks’ book, it becomes apparent that this exemplary leader would have never become a General Officer without a tremendous educational background. He would have been unable to lead America’s fight against global terrorism had he not first received an excellent civilian education from an accredited institution of higher learning. Military laws make it mandatory for all commissioned officers in the military to have at least a bachelor’s degree. One must also receive an advanced degree (graduate, postgraduate, or professional) to be promoted to higher field grade ranks and beyond to the General Officer ranks. The United States government places a premium on its military leaders receiving a solid higher-level education to lead our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines in wartime. Additionally, acquiring a solid higher education makes for a well-rounded leader and makes them more in touch with the populace they serve. Against this backdrop, the present phenomenological study examines how student veterans can go about enrolling, matriculating, and graduating from institutions of higher learning not only at the bachelor’s level but also continuing to graduate and postgraduate studies.

Purpose of the Study

A student veteran can obtain a college degree completely free and even receive a substantial living stipend while attending college. For example, in the Murray, Kentucky, area, most veterans currently attending college at Murray State University, hereafter referred to as a

comprehensive mid-sized regional university, receive a Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rate of approximately \$1,100.00 a month while attending college. This stipend is on top of the Veterans Administration (VA) paying a qualified veteran's full tuition, books, fees, and miscellaneous expenses (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).

This point is mentioned to reinforce the immense value to the student veteran and the university in recruiting veterans to attend undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs at a comprehensive mid-sized regional college or university.

The value to the university includes enrollment, revenue, and credential completers. The value to the student veteran is credential attainment.

The purpose of the study is to better understand how veterans who may already have an undergraduate degree or are pursuing an undergraduate degree can continue their educational pursuits to the next level. Whether paying for their education privately or utilizing the VA benefits offered, the goal is to enhance their lives, continue their lifelong learning experiences, and continue serving their country by using and leveraging their unique knowledge, skills, and abilities (Arminio et al., 2015). This study could potentially be leveraged by a comprehensive mid-sized regional university to increase its enrollment of student veterans seeking a graduate or postgraduate degree.

Conceptual Framework

Research Questions

The researcher used in-depth questionnaires, observations, and mailers to collect detailed data from student veterans who had been awarded an undergraduate degree for this study and formulate the research questions. Specifically, the researcher used three research questions to steer and guide each subject to reveal answers to the Grand Research question:

Grand tour question: How can more student veterans be recruited to graduate and postgraduate programs at mid-sized regional universities?

Research question 1: What understanding of military to college transition factors do student veterans possess?

Research question 2: To what extent do financial resources impact student veterans' graduate or postgraduate pursuits?

Research question 3: What are student veterans' perceptions of educational advocacy programs?

Significance of the Study

Surveys point out that most of the country realizes our servicemen and women sacrifice a great deal and give their today for our tomorrow. However, very few in the general population understand that a literal contract exists between the country and these service members to educate them if they choose (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). Specifically, many veterans get lured into military service with the promise of receiving a free higher education upon fulfilling their military obligation. Primarily if that service member served in combat or in a time of declared war. Typically, it is not understood by our country's populace that a moral obligation is owed to help these veterans become college graduates at the highest degree or diploma level possible. Indeed, many veterans fail to take advantage of these benefits and this obligation out of sheer fear, intimidation, lack of awareness, or the inability to navigate the federal government's bureaucracy, which, in this case, is the Department of Defense. This study details the specific P-20 elements of diversity, leadership, innovation, and implementation related to the student

veteran. This phenomenological qualitative study is particularly significant because it addresses the core elements of the P-20 program at a comprehensive mid-sized regional university and explores how a university can go about honoring that moral imperative to educate veterans post-baccalaureate while simultaneously bolstering its enrollment numbers in graduate and Postgraduate programs.

This study will examine the social, emotional, psychological, and even physical barriers many student veterans face in deciding to continue their graduate and postgraduate studies. The study will also examine how the transition from military to academic life can be successful even in the face of discrimination, loneliness, isolation, lack of a support structure, stress, illness, cognitive and physical challenges, and the stigma of being a military veteran. Ultimately, this study will enforce the notion that student veterans are an untapped source of experience, knowledge, innovation, and leadership that must be captured to ensure further our nation's survival in these very austere global environments.

Assumptions

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the factors and phenomena that led student veterans to pursue a graduate or postgraduate degree. The researcher assumed all participants were forthright and provided answers that accurately reflected their opinions on the questions asked and topics covered. Any data deemed false or inaccurate was excluded as such data skew the results and are of no use to this study.

Limitations

The researcher conducted this qualitative study only in the State of Kentucky at one comprehensive mid-sized regional university. In-person interviews were the preferred method of data collection. However, not all interviewees were available for an in-person session. In those

cases, video conferencing via ZOOM™ was used to conduct interviews and record phenomenological data. After each interview was recorded on audio, the information was transcribed, and a database was compiled for further analysis. The subjective nature of qualitative research itself was another limitation of the study. Qualitative data are difficult to generalize and categorize. Although no qualitative studies are statistically generalizable, their findings can be transferred (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This study provided real-world experiences and descriptions of the phenomena that each participant experienced.

Delimitations

This phenomenological study rendered information on why student veterans did or did not pursue a graduate degree after completing their undergraduate diplomas. All subjects could fully recall their decision-making processes for pursuing or not pursuing their postgraduate degrees. The fieldwork for this study, including interviews, survey distribution data collection, data recording, and data analysis, was accomplished in approximately four months (17 weeks).

Definitions

P-20 refers to the seamless development of all learners, prenatal through adulthood (P-20 System and student Transitions, 2019).

Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) – This is an allowance to offset the cost of housing when government-provided housing is not received. One's BAH depends upon their location, pay grade, and whether one has dependents. BAH rates are set by surveying the cost of rental properties in each geographic location.

Forever GI Bill – The Forever GI Bill eliminated the 15-year use-it-or-lose-it constraint associated with the Post 9/11 GI Bill education benefit.

GI Bill - GI Bill benefits facilitate the payment of college, graduate school, and training programs. Since 1944, the GI Bill has helped qualifying Veterans and their family members get money to cover all or some of the costs for school or training.

Montgomery GI Bill - The Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) provides up to 36 months of education benefits to eligible Servicemembers and Veterans for programs such as college, business, technical, or vocational school; apprenticeship / on-the-job training; correspondence courses; remedial, deficiency, and refresher training (in some cases); and flight training. One typically has ten years to use their MGIB benefits, but the time limit can be fewer or more years, depending on the situation.

Post 9/11 GI Bill - The Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) helps pay for school or job training. If one served on active duty after September 10, 2001, they might qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33).

Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) - VA education benefit program is designed to provide educational assistance to members of the Reserve components called or ordered to active duty in response to a war or national emergency (contingency operation) as declared by the President or Congress.

Tuition Assistance - Military Tuition Assistance (TA) is awarded to a student under the assumption that the student will attend school for the entire period for which the assistance is awarded. TA funds are earned proportionally during enrollment, with unearned funds returned when the student stops attending.

Veterans Administration - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides vital services to America's veterans. The VA specifically provides health care services, benefits programs, and access to national cemeteries to former military personnel and their dependents.

Veterans of Foreign Wars - The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), formally the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, is an organization of U.S. war veterans, who, as military service members, fought in wars, campaigns, and expeditions on foreign land, waters, or airspace.

Veteran Student Organization (VSO) - The local VSO chapters are student groups formed on college and university campuses to provide peer-to-peer networks for veterans attending those schools. The chapters are designed to advocate for student veterans and help bridge the campus-to-career transition.

Summary

This study aims to determine why student veterans do or do not continue their graduate and postgraduate education after obtaining a baccalaureate degree. In this context, the first chapter provided a reasonable justification and a moral imperative for performing this specific qualitative research study. The findings will help student veterans make better choices when considering the risks and benefits of pursuing a graduate or postgraduate degree (Herrmann et al., 2009). The study will also help educators better understand and assist a unique minority group (many student veterans are multiple minorities) with specialized needs to attain a graduate or postgraduate education. Understanding challenges and the unique opportunities student veterans face enriches the student veteran's life and the life of all other educational and societal stakeholders (Chandrasekan, 2016). Learning about these challenges and opportunities helps

student veterans and educators navigate a more straightforward path to higher education success. Perhaps no other group among the student population warrants a higher moral imperative than those who fought for our freedoms and to preserve our way of life.

Many student veterans are female, disabled, and have physical, mental, psychological, and emotional issues. Many student veterans are minorities of other ethnic and social groups (Moore, 2017). However, every single one of them is our nation's hero. The next chapter reviews relevant and available literature on student veterans in higher education. While not every available manuscript or medium that addresses student veterans in higher education is cited, the most applicable and pertinent are listed along with other supporting works.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Extant literature is replete with examples, case studies, articles, peer-reviewed journals, and other documents detailing educational benefits and opportunities for veterans. The literature also comprises various programs and benefits offered to student veterans who desire to obtain a college degree. Since the advent of The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly referred to as the GI Bill, which offered a range of benefits for returning World War II veterans, millions of veterans have obtained a higher education or vocation using this vehicle (Herrmann et al., 2009). The original GI Bill expired in 1956, but the term GI Bill continues to denote programs created to assist American military veterans in obtaining college degrees.

There have been many iterations and different programs offered by the Veterans Administration (VA) to those veterans desiring to obtain a college degree (Herrmann et al., 2009). The different GI Bill Programs include Chapter 30, the Montgomery GI Bill for Active Duty (MGIB-AD), the Forever GI Bill, the Post 911 GI Bill, the Montgomery GI Bill – Selective Reserve (MGIB-SR), as well as the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) Program. Each branch of the Bill is targeted to assist veterans and active-duty service members per their unique service to the United States (Herrmann et al., 2009).

Most of these programs are geared toward undergraduate studies and vocational education. Each benefit program offered by the VA to veterans seeking a college degree has pros and cons. As a case in point, the Montgomery GI Bill, a post 9/11 GI Bill, and a forever GI Bill are accompanied by their advantages and disadvantages. There is even a tuition assistance program for those military members still on active duty Cubbage (2016). This literature will look

at these programs and examine the best way forward for a service member or veteran to obtain their college degree utilizing one of these vehicles or a combination of two or more.

Many books, journals, and articles are written and are being written to inform the student veteran how he or she can take advantage of the various government benefits for educational programs to obtain a bachelor's degree or vocational certification. A discussion of this existing literature and what literature needs to be incorporated or created to bridge the gap between veteran undergraduate and postgraduate education will be offered.

Currently Available Literature

Currently, there is a paucity of information on how a veteran with a college degree should obtain a graduate or postgraduate degree using their legally mandated veterans' educational benefits under the numerous programs offered. This literature review will consider what information is explicitly available to veterans obtaining graduate or postgraduate degrees in chronological order. This study will specifically refer to a master's or doctoral-level degree using one of the veteran's higher education assistance benefit programs mentioned earlier. Furthermore, considerations of best practices and legal mandates that enable student veterans to advance their education to the graduate and postgraduate levels will be examined in discussing this literature.

A canvassing and review of existing literature will ensue, and an assessment of its value as it pertains to the veteran student's usability will be made. Finally, we will critically analyze the literature and offer recommendations and conclusions based on that literature, to enhance and promote more student veterans using available higher education benefits to obtain a postgraduate or graduate degree.

Importance of GI Bill

Herrmann et al. (2009), combat veterans, shed light on a congressional awakening to the plight of the flailing GI Bill. Senator James Webb, a war veteran, produced a new GI Bill that forced lawmakers to deeply examine how veterans fare and their attempts to get a higher education. The II GI Bill is one of the most successful pieces of legislation in U.S. history (Herrmann et al., 2009). Thousands of our nation's heroes, known as the Greatest Generation, used the GI bill to get an education.

Unfortunately, things went downhill for the GI Bill from that point onwards. The Korean, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq Wars, coupled with other conflicts such as Grenada, Panama, and East Africa, did not enjoy the educational support in Congress as that of the original Montgomery GI Bill (Herrmann et al., 2009). Over the years, these benefits have waxed and waned. However, this history is replete with examples of our country's lost and untapped potential by the failure to take advantage of this specialized knowledge of returning veterans to our country. There are many vital factors in helping veterans obtain their college education despite the challenges in chronicling the educational pursuits of such a broad and dispersed group of individuals (Herrmann et al., 2009).

From Military Life to Civilian College Life

The literature begins by examining the history of educating America's veterans and then explores the factors that discourage veterans from completing college and the problems reported by veterans seeking higher education (Herrmann et al., 2009). Transitioning from military to civilian college life is one common theme in all texts discussing veteran higher education (Herrmann et al., 2009). Veterans can be under the impression that academic life will be too rigorous. However, when juxtaposed with the routine tasks of their military careers, it becomes

apparent that the rigors and routines of daily military life far outweigh those of the typical academic day. Put succinctly, there is a particular route that veterans can adopt to obtain a college degree. The culture veterans can expect to face on a college campus, and the unique challenges to that culture also assume significance. Herman et al. (2009) explore financial considerations, and perhaps the most significant fear factor, how to transfer college credit from their military experiences to their academic records.

Veterans are faced with unique health challenges. These challenges center on the mental, psychological, emotional, and spiritual help veterans require (Herrmann et al., 2009). Those colleges and universities that tailor programs, via policy formulation, to veterans are preferable. These facets of tailoring support programs to student veterans entail unique consequences, such as addressing physical and mental disabilities as a result of war. Herrmann et al. recommend that veterans maintain their extremely high levels of physical fitness to ensure that their daily routine becomes more familiar and that they remain in good mental shape.

One crucial facet of successfully transitioning from a military to an academic culture is purposely accommodating veterans in an academic environment so they are comfortable with their new environment. Steps that can be taken to improve the collegiate educational experience for veterans are numerous but center mainly on providing a structured support system among student veterans at their educational institution. The authors also investigate the consequences for veterans and society if these problems are not eliminated. Herrmann et al. (2009) continue to speak about improving higher education systems for veterans and offer specific solutions throughout the text, including leadership solutions and practical strategies. Leadership must buy into and be onboard as part of the veteran experience at their institutions of higher learning to facilitate positive change in student veteran experiences and success.

Cubbage (2016) exposes the reader to what it takes to enroll in college and graduate as a student veteran. Cubbage, a combat veteran, goes on to discuss creating a foundation of support with friends, family, veterans' groups, and other student veterans. Helping student veterans navigate the complex world of higher learning in the United States is the primary aim.

Cubbage (2016) takes the reader on a step-by-step journey on what it takes for a student veteran to obtain a degree from an institution of higher learning. Although every college is different, standardized tests such as the SAT, the GRE, and writing samples are needed to gain admission to almost every university. Cubbage (2016) presents the reader with a discussion on converting military training and transcripts into academic credit. Knowing how to convert prior experience and knowledge is a handy tool and skill set for any practitioner assisting student veterans.

Cubbage (2016) explores the old military myth that one should never talk about themselves and urges the student veteran to create an "I love me" book. This self-promoting handbook helps with resumé references and applications throughout the student veteran's college life. Cubbage discusses the Americans with Disabilities Act and other legislation supporting student veterans dealing with physical disabilities and mental health issues in an academic environment.

The Montgomery GI Bill versus the post 9/11 GI Bill versus vocational rehab and how to go to school while undergoing treatment for any of these issues are also touched on.

Once the student veteran has an admission package and understands the benefits available to him or her, the author focuses on finding the right school for the student veteran. The author talks about planning one's work and working on one's plan. Using one's military discipline to plan, execute, and achieve is a central theme for all student veterans (Cubbage, 2016). Using

one's pre-learned self-discipline and regimen to his or her advantage in a college atmosphere is also discussed.

Reassimilation into the civilian world and entering the academic environment do not have to be tough. Interaction with professors, fellow students, and alums can lessen the blow (Cubbage, 2016). Cubbage reserves a portion of the text on dealing with the questions most veterans are inevitably asked. Questions such as "Have you ever killed someone?" "What is it like to kill someone?" or "Were you afraid?" Regardless, the author focuses on the fact that the student veteran alone oversees their destiny and is a part of achieving a mission at all costs, which all veterans learned in the service. Furthermore, to do so, one must be able to plan, execute and stay focused.

The importance of extracurricular activities such as fraternities and sororities, sports teams, student organizations, and veterans' organizations, as well as prioritizing and balancing one's social life with family obligations and academic obligations, eases the transition from military life to academic life for student veterans (Cubbage, 2016). Maintaining one's cool, avoiding conflict, defusing conflict, finding common ground, and dealing with the stresses of being overwhelmed are important (Cubbage, 2016).

Prioritization and realization are essential tools to develop for student veterans (Cubbage, 2016). Specifically, the student veteran should realize they may be too deep and plan a constructive exit in such circumstances. These issues occur in everyone's college life experience. The author also talks about experiential learning in the military and how experiential learning can be used in an academic environment; in essence, doing the right thing all the time, even when no one is listening or looking, pays off big time in a college environment (Cubbage, 2016). Finally, the author advises the reader on understanding how to market one's military skills on a

resumé and transfer that experience to a prospective employer. This book discusses interviewing techniques concerning past experiences with a military promotion board (Cubbage, 2016).

Other Nuances on This Transition

For professional higher education practitioners with no military exposure, texts are dedicated to instructing them on how to engineer a military-friendly school (Kelley et al., 2013). For example, offering specific data on a student veteran's life is very helpful to both the veteran and the non-military educator.

The book presents graphs and tables that efficiently summarize data for non-military educators and student veterans. The authors back their views and experiences with credible data, as evidenced by all data sources and interviews used in this book: military veterans (Kelley et al., 2013). After providing the context, it discusses how student veterans' transitional experiences shape their educational outcomes. Further, the text discusses setting up a campus to facilitate veterans with disabilities to achieve their educational goals successfully. In the second part of this book, the authors offer innovative approaches to serving veterans on campus (Kelley et al., 2013). Serving disabled veterans includes recruitment, orientation, veteran student support services, specialized academic programs for veterans, and the possibility of veterans entering higher education from a community college perspective. Kelley et al. (2013) delve deeper into some innovative approaches to serving student veterans inside the classroom. These approaches include how to structure, design, and deliver courses to a student veteran population, among others.

Examining the physical, emotional, and behavioral environments that student veterans experience while learning at an advanced academic institution (Kelley et al., 2013) is critical to understanding student veteran dispositions. For instance, many veterans continue to return from

overseas conflicts and enroll in higher education, utilizing their benefits significantly (Kelley et al., 2013). Veterans make excellent students and have some salient advantages over other students since they are mature, possess a strong self-identity, have a purpose, set goals, and take pride in their work. They have had significant life experiences and are motivated to reach their goals no matter what (Kelley et al., 2013).

Many student veterans have a higher risk index for success than any other racial or ethnic minority group. Many student veterans have disabilities. These disabilities are often undiagnosed or unacknowledged and result in fear of failure for many veterans. Succinctly put, any higher educational institution that can successfully recruit and retain student veterans fulfills a recruiting goal and a moral obligation to the student veteran. According to the authors, any school successfully serving the student veteran will find itself a competitive advantage (Kelley et al., 2013).

Veterans Helping Other Veterans

Several texts written by veterans turned college professor address how a local network of professors who have military experience can assist student veterans entering an institution of higher learning and desiring to receive their college degrees be successful. Cass (2014) focuses on the importance of adopting a strategic student mindset to achieve college success and developing a mindset that will successfully prevent academic problems, which helps one transition from the military to college and manage one's grades. Next, the author discusses a student veteran's academic skills to succeed. These skills need to be repackaged and refocused to ensure that student veterans make the most of their time in the academic realm (Cass, 2014).

Cass (2014) expounds on the importance of test-taking skills, paper-writing skills, and ways of mastering learning outside of the classroom. In the book's final portion, Cass (2014)

details perhaps the most salient points of his book by describing to the student veteran how to best manage stress levels to control one's destiny. The stress of academics, albeit new for the student veteran, is easier to manage than the constant stress of daily military life. Each of these details reflects the importance of veterans helping each other.

The entire spectrum of a student veteran's lifecycle needs to be considered and analyzed before attempting any support plan to help them (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). This lifecycle begins by providing a historical framework of the policy surrounding student veteran benefits and student veteran history stemming from that policy. Specifically, the military and higher education in the United States is a symbiotic relationship, and how ex-veterans have and are continuing to play an essential role in helping their fellow veterans. The contemporary political and legislative frameworks intended to serve current-day student veterans and service members are essential (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). They highlight the gap in existing research: "Existing literature about student veterans from previous eras provides only partial insights into the current generation of returning veterans and the institutional implications of their presence (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013).

Hamrick and Rumann (2013) offer actionable vignettes for each thought from this point onwards. They address ways of keeping student veterans on track, adding that they must keep up even though they may be out of the classroom due to their military obligations. Hamrick and Rumann (2013) explain ways of handling the return of student veterans to college campuses once their deployments and activations are completed – an area where veterans can play a crucial role. The interplay between contemporary student veterans and their academic enrollment patterns and engagement using data and examples often becomes tricky and needs to be dealt with accordingly. Hamrick and Rumann (2013) also posit that the complexity of understanding the

role of gender, race, and sexuality is not unique to non-veteran students. Veteran students are a product of society, albeit with different experience bases. This understanding includes not only physical disabilities but psychological, emotional, and mental disabilities because of war.

Enrolling and Completing a Degree Program

Enrolling, transferring, and completing a degree program at an institution of higher learning for student veterans is the goal of each student veteran (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). student veterans' college pursuits often get impeded for several reasons. These interruptions are frustrating for students and the institution of higher learning. Exploring the nuances of the various offices and programs set up by the Veterans Administration and the military services to assist student veterans in completing a degree program is crucial (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). This examination includes student veteran organizations and student advocacy groups at both official government and unofficial local levels. It also covers student veteran organizations that may be present on a particular campus.

Called to Serve also looks at the institutional leadership that serves student veterans and military members (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). The authors address head-on what institutional leadership needs to do to create a healthy environment for student veterans. Finally, it outlines ways of promoting organizational change to create a veteran-friendly campus. The authors then specify a case study for academia and student veterans that sums up all the previous points mentioned and analyzed in this book (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013).

The most compelling study on veteran success in graduating with a college degree describes the science behind why some West Point Cadets make it through the Military Academy and why others do not (Duckworth, 2008). The author uses scientific-based data derived from interviews and questionnaires to measure the amount of innate perseverance, tenacity, discipline,

and grit a candidate possesses. The author calls this winning (but heretofore unmeasured) formula “grit.”

Before this ground-breaking work was published, the United States Military Academy at West Point was unsuccessful in determining which of its candidates would make it through the arduous long-haul training. After all, just getting to West Point requires tenacity. Life at West Point is a new and heightened level of rigor, discipline, and self motivation. Not every candidate makes it through to receive their diploma and commission as a United States Army Officer. Several of the most promising cadets routinely drop out (Duckworth, 2008). How does one measure grit, and how does one do it in a data-driven manner? The author gave all incoming cadets at West Point’s 2004 class the grit test and predicted with extremely high accuracy. The previous “whole man” concept being used was obliterated, and the new “grit scale” was emplaced (Duckworth, 2008).

Talent and skill are merged in the measuring of “grit.” The reader learns that it is not intelligence, resources, ability, or even natural-borne ability that makes a winner versus a loser; it is “grit.” Those driven by purpose, willing to put in hours and hours of practice, and those who share a passion for what they do are the ones who persevere (Duckworth, 2008). There is a readily recognizable lesson in this book for every Veteran. Each veteran has been down this road and possesses the grit they need to graduate at higher levels of learning.

Bridging the Chasm – Resources and Community Building

The divide between the military and civilian worlds concerning academia and higher education in the form of writing and composition is pronounced (Doe & Langstraat, 2014). The authors divide the text into three distinct sections to address this chasm. The first part deals with the divide between understanding veterans in the civilian world. Veterans engaged in college

courses need writing (Doe & Langstraat, 2014) tutors. Student veterans should be introduced to rhetoric as a writing style, possibly for the first time, before looking at the previous genres they were familiar with and outlining solutions that can help them become better academic writers. Faculty members should act like first responders when helping student veterans shift from a rigid writing style to a more fluid one (Doe & Langstraat, 2014).

Part II of *Generation Vet - Composition, Student -Veterans, and the Post-9/11 University* examines veteran and public audiences. Specifically, the authors opine that veteran students can become part of a community writing group, a workshop, or other public venues (Doe & Langstraat, 2014). Also, veterans' workshops and seminars to improve their writing skills can play a vital role. One must examine the traits and characteristics of those post-9/11 veterans that may have special medical issues that need to be addressed, the motivation for student veterans to obtain a degree, and how previous military experiences can affect that outcome (Doe & Langstraat, 2014).

In part III of this book, the authors take head-on recognizing silence in student veterans, adding that the written medium can delineate composition, writing, and ethical aspects of war. The book comes full circle and talks about veterans leading learning communities and primary writing groups. Veterans leading veterans tend to have better outcomes regardless of the subject matter (Doe & Langstraat, 2014). The experiential learning of student veterans can be used as an asset in pursuing higher education. Finally, the authors talk specifically about Marine student veterans, their unique challenges, and their unique skills that can be leveraged in a classroom (Doe & Langstraat, 2014).

The All-Important Diversity

No other marginalized college students stand a bigger chance of failure than student veterans (Arminio et al., 2015). This point needs to be explored and studied in detail to help student veterans seeking a graduate or postgraduate work at American universities. No credible study of student veteran success is complete without considering diversity. In this context, diversity is one of the four key student learning objectives of the P-20 program. Specific to the purpose of this study, diversity within diversity applies to the student veteran population. Like their non-student counterparts, student veterans comprise several different racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, and gender backgrounds. This wide array of backgrounds makes diversity a subject unique to this group (Arminio et al., 2015).

This cultural context is assumed to be significant because it demonstrates that each veteran may bring their unique culture with them. Moreover, they all bring a culture of military life as well. Put succinctly; student veterans are dual citizens of the academic world (Arminio et al., 2015). Once this cultural concept is understood deeper, it becomes much easier to facilitate, formulate, and deliver academic success to that student demographic (Arminio et al., 2015).

Based on the data provided, Arminio et al. (2015) elucidates the barriers existing for both the student veteran and institutions of higher learning, especially concerning diversity. With this insight, the authors then put forward an advocacy model that can be transported to other institutions of higher learning on a best-practice basis to be adopted by any college or university that may need those (Arminio et al., 2015). It is also pertinent to understand the unique and complex issues of student veteran identity and the student veteran mindset from a diverse standpoint. Furthermore, addressing a student veteran's particular mindset or physical disposition

as an additional diversity topic also needs to be acknowledged (Arminio et al., 2015). Equity for student veterans is an issue they accord much significance as well.

According to the authors, because student veterans are a minority and marginalized group, each college and university should put as much effort into ensuring the inclusion of these student veterans as any other collegiate diversity program (Arminio et al., 2015). This book eventually talks about future challenges in a way-ahead-based manner to address the facets mentioned above of student veteran life. An essential takeaway from considering student veterans as a multi-diverse group is that student veterans should always be considered a group with special needs beyond the average student (Arminio et al., 2015).

Most veterans cling to their military identity (A Soldier, a Sailor, an Airman, a Marine) before they profess any other type of minority status (Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American). Most veterans will also identify with their military affiliation before any hidden minority status (Jewish, gay, first-generation American). Therefore, recognizing recognize this diverse group's unity must be recognized despite its apparent marked differences (Vacchi et al., 2020).

Professional educators must realize this strength of character and honor code as an asset to their classrooms and teaching objectives. Veterans come from every socio-economic, political, religious, ethnic, gender, and societal level in America. Student veterans have learned how to exist and thrive in an ethnically diverse environment (Vacchi et al., 2020).

Student veterans are a tremendous source of diverse knowledge and practice in action. Acknowledging, including, and engaging student veterans in higher education is recommended to leverage a hidden wellspring of diverse knowledge, experience, and application (Vacchi et al., 2020). Further, diversity at colleges and universities is an asset when it is treated as such. Student veterans bring this strength as a force multiplier to any academic rigor or program. Diversity and

veteran friendliness need not be lip service, as most student veterans are used to this realm and can utilize the diversity of thought and opinion to facilitate successful outcomes (Vacchi et al., 2020).

Global Relevance

Higher education from an international and global perspective should always be considered when one discusses student veterans in higher education. Global insight is relevant to the study of the student veteran in that student veterans are indeed global learners amongst college and university student populations today. Most student veterans have served, lived, studied, and operated in foreign countries (Altbach, 2016). Higher education is increasingly becoming an international venture. From the influx of international students to and from the U.S., the professional educator must focus on how higher education must accommodate this new global reality (Altbach, 2016).

Additionally, massive open online courses are becoming the norm with the advent of the internet. This factor has expanded exponentially during the current global COVID-19 pandemic (Altbach, 2016). Moreover, the internet enables higher education to access virtually anywhere on the globe. In this context, *Global Perspectives on Higher Education* explains how this newfound global access creates more competition for fewer students (Albacht, 2016). The competition will only increase in the future, and student veterans must cope with these technological changes. These change factors are essential as international borders are no longer considered barriers to higher education. A global realignment of educational superpowers is already being acknowledged and becoming an overbearing reality. Against this backdrop, the student veteran is perhaps ideally placed in higher education to embrace this change and manage, lead, and effect it (Altbach, 2016) because student veterans are acclimatized to tackling global issues. Due to their

military service, they are familiar with living and traveling to foreign lands, are culturally aware and sensitive, and speak different languages (Altbach, 2016).

There is a ranking of global colleges and universities that do not always include U.S. institutions (Altbach, 2016). Due to widespread access to financial resources for student veterans to attend college, many universities seek that revenue stream in the future. Thankfully student veterans will likely study at home due to their visceral patriotism. However, it is possible that student veterans also use their educational benefits at foreign institutions of higher. (Altbach, 2016).

The Power of Collaboration and Interaction

The book then discusses new centers and peripheries of higher education worldwide (Altbach, 2016). Countries like China, India, and Russia are becoming increasingly dominant in the online realms of higher education. Altbach (2016) notes that student veterans are well-positioned to ensure that the United States stays at the forefront of international education, although it cannot be guaranteed. Along with these global shifts in higher education centers of gravity, one must consider policy, equity, diversity, tolerance, and access.

Altbach (2016) states that higher education and global knowledge will be future economic drivers. Collaboration and interaction, including international exchanges of ideas, embody the idea of "adapt or die" time in global, national, regional, and local higher education. Such experiences give the student veteran an upper hand in pioneering higher education in the future. Altbach (2016) noted that this unique experience base needs to be captured and promulgated to all higher education students. One valuable text that describes the process of strategic decision-making within the legislative framework of higher learning is Public Policy and Higher Education Reframing Strategies for Preparation, Access, and College Success (St.

John, et al., 2018). The text, albeit not specifically about veteran students, is designed as a tool for understanding the evolution of public education policy (St. John, et al., 2018). This text is designed to be a source for any practitioner or student of policy and higher education.

The authors discuss how college students should prepare to enter an institution of higher education and how to complete a degree and be successful while considering the framework of the policy mentioned above. This book underscores how critical it is that any student veteran or academician serving student veterans stay up to date on the ever-changing political ideologies influencing higher education. Most student veterans will be financing their educations with congressionally mandated funds, and programs necessitate staying abreast of such policy changes (St. John, et al., 2018). The evolution of political ideologies during the three grand periods in the United States has influenced access to higher education. This evolution includes demographic and ideological changes (St. John, et al., 2018).

This textbook will be used to further the final dissertation and support or refute data findings from a policy perspective (St. John, et al., 2018). In this context, it is poignant to note that the GI Bill initially positively impacted college attendance and degree completion for white and African American men outside the south but widened the gap elsewhere in the United States Post World War II (St. John, et al., 2018). Even though this is no longer the case, the important takeaway is that even the best-intentioned policies can lead to negative consequences and must be made as positive for as many sets of student veterans as possible.

The VA educational policy is constantly evaluated, assessed, and adjusted to provide student veterans with the best possible educational benefits. The policies that grant financial assistance to student veterans are one of the most lucrative educational policies the U.S. Government provides. This policy is equitable, fair, and well worth taking advantage of by the

student veteran. The current policy that provides student veterans with educational benefits is working (St. John, et al., 2018).

When one juxtaposes all the facets of what a higher education program should entail, the legislation supporting the GI Bill covers most of those concerns. This policy will need to be re-analyzed, reassessed, and adjusted to provide future student veterans seeking graduate and postgraduate degrees more flexibility (St. John, et al., 2018). As of now, the policy is working but could continuously be improved. The questions of "how and why?" must be answered first.

In *What's Next for student veterans*, D. DiRamio, (2017) attempts to portend what the future will hold for the student veteran. A data-driven inquiry into student veterans' perspectives on success opens this text. Further, the author looks at the opportunities, the inequity, and intersections with military-connected people in higher education (DiRamio, 2017). Here, the author explores patterns of academic success amongst disabled student veterans. The term disabled again is used to define cognitive and physical disabilities. The author believes that it is important to understand student veterans' mental health challenges; he dedicated an entire chapter to the subject (DiRamio, 2017).

DiRamio (2017) opines that a robust social structure needs to be in place for all student veterans attending institutions of higher learning. This social structure should include other student veterans, faculty members, students, families, and community members. The author states that it is a societal imperative that promises to return veterans to educate them upon their return home from service be kept (DiRamio, 2017). This includes instituting peer support efforts and learning best practices from those student veterans that have come before them. The book completes an in-depth study of student veteran progression toward degree attainment in the post-9/11 era and analyzes the academic outcomes of millions of veterans. The text looks at the

community college level to postgraduate level education and degrees for the student veteran but primarily focuses on undergraduate success factors. DiRamio (2017) discusses strategic thinking, skill development, funding sources, regression analysis, demographics, and statistics (chi-squared results germane). In essence, the book looks at data and analyzes information to minimize student veterans' risk in college.

A compact work entitled *Combat to College* (Davis, 2020) is a hip-pocket book on student veteran academic survival. Specifically, this small but straight-to-the-point book details what this combat vet experienced when he started college through to when he obtained his degree. After graduating from High School, his excessive partying and wasting time in community college caused him to flunk out. (Davis, 2020) states he was not mature enough or disciplined enough to be ready to take on the rigors of academic life, which is why he joined the army. This cycle is not uncommon among student veterans. Many poor and failed students will join the military to do two things: 1.) gain some self-discipline and experience, and 2.) get money for college (Davis, 2020).

In *Combat to College*, the author shows us how applying a military mentality to the classroom leads to success as a student. The second time around, as a student veteran in college, the author graduated with his degree and became a successful author (Davis, 2020). The author does not recommend what a new student veteran should do; he tells them. For instance, he tells them to sit up front, use grit, not give up, be afraid to look stupid, reach up when they need help, and reach down to help others. These facets illustrate the basic premise of daily military life as in other texts examined. This author tells the reader not to be afraid to blow their own horn and build a resumé of accomplishments (Davis, 2020).

The text, *The Fifth Wave, the Evolution of American Higher Education* (Crow & Dabars, 2020) posits that the United States has undergone four waves of educational growth, change, evolution, and utility. There exists a set of design constraints that no longer align with the changing needs of our society as it pertains to higher education. The innovation of discovery is carried out mainly in isolation from the socio-economic challenges faced by most Americans (Crow & Dabars, 2020). This isolation impairs these institutions' capacity to contribute decisively and consistently to the collective good. Further, the global prominence of our leading institutions does not correlate with the overall excellence in American higher education. For example, the admission system excludes many academically qualified applicants, which is now the norm in our public and private universities (Crow & Dabars, 2020).

The authors of *The Fifth Wave* do not explicitly mention student veterans. However, it alludes to the GI Bill, the service academies, and specific legislation, such as the National Defense Educational Act of 1958, regarding redesigning the American university. Colleges and universities need to be comprehensively redesigned to educate millions of more qualified students (Crow & Dabars, 2020). Examining historical developments of American higher education in the first four waves describes the emerging standard of institutions that will transition and reshape the next (fifth) wave of American higher education.

In the Fifth Wave, the authors espouse the outcome of the fifth wave of higher education in the United States. A collaboration of open networks that includes academia, business, industry, and the government is secondhand nature to the student veteran. The authors contend that America's fifth wave of education should focus on student needs and access and be regionally embedded but serve a global purpose (Crow & Dabars, 2020). There is no better student to do this than the student veteran. Student veterans are used to drawing on various

disciplines across a broad spectrum to accomplish a mission. They are also used to accelerating positive social change and integrating world-class knowledge and cutting-edge innovation. The student veteran is also no stranger to diverse demographic makeups and socio-economic members operating on the same team. Nor is the student veteran a stranger to cooperation and collaboration and ensuring a mission set gets accomplished.

The book also describes a prototype for a fifth-wave university (Crow & Dabars, 2020). Arizona State University (ASU) is the closest to embodying this prototype. The prototype has been operationalized within ASU since 2002 and works quite well. Enrollment is up, interest is up, and the conferring of over a hundred thousand degrees has occurred over the past ten years (Crow & Dabars, 2020). The framework to facilitate authentic universal learning includes massive online open courses, free courses, certificate programs, socially aware curriculums, knowledge enterprise, and scaling.

For a fifth wave of education across the American educational enterprise, costs will be at the forefront of concerns, closely followed by access. This cost factor is a consideration for a way ahead and pioneering student veteran higher education for future vets. No longer will the status quo of global higher education suffice for society writ large, the student, the teacher, or the consumer.

Analysis

In reading and reviewing the literature on student veterans in higher education, it is apparent that many schools, including this comprehensive mid-sized regional university, can do a better job of recruiting, matriculating, and graduating student veterans. Particularly in the graduate and postgraduate (to include Doctoral level) programs. There exists a moral imperative

that U.S. Public colleges and universities provide a healthy, robust, and supportive environment to attract and graduate any student veteran desiring a college education.

The literature notes that several programs, policies, legislations, and support agencies can be leveraged to grow a university's student veteran population. The incumbency for this change falls on the university's senior leadership and policymakers to affect this change (Crow & Dabars, 2020; Davis, 2020). The student veteran support office on the campus of each college or university should carry out policy by interacting with the appropriate governmental, state, local, and support offices involved in ensuring student veterans are given every opportunity to achieve their goal of graduating from college (Crow & Dabars, 2020; Davis, 2020).

This literature review uncovered something called a *Military Friendly® Schools* list. The list is published yearly and includes virtually every college or university in the U.S. The list is compiled using collected data from survey responses sent to each college or university. Notably, student veterans fervently consult it to find the best schools for them. This survey and findings carry a lot of credence and weight with prospective student veterans on where to go to college.

The Military Friendly® Schools survey is the longest-running, most comprehensive review of college and university investments in serving military and veteran students (Young, 2021). The current 2021-2022 Military Friendly® Schools list is more exclusive than ever. This list covers institutions offering certificate programs, bachelor's to doctoral degrees, and veteran support organizations at the listed institutions of higher learning (Young, 2021). Institutions earning the Military Friendly® School designation were evaluated using public data sources and responses from a proprietary survey. Over 1,200 schools participated in the 2021-2022 survey, with 750 schools earning the designation of Military Friendly® School - of which 162 were

selected for the "Gold" award status for their leading practices, outcomes, and effective programs (Young, 2021).

Eight Kentucky colleges or universities made the 2021-2022 Military Friendly® Schools list. This comprehensive mid-sized regional university is one of the colleges in Kentucky considered Military Friendly. However, this comprehensive mid-sized regional university barely made the listing on that published list. Eastern Kentucky University and The University of the Cumberlands were rated in the Top Ten - or gold category. These schools are attracting the most Kentucky student veterans and more student veterans nationwide. As per the number of student veterans enrolling, these two schools are worthy of emulation when becoming prominent educators and attractors of student veterans.

Figure 1 below graphically displays the levels of seven Kentucky institutions of higher learning that are listed as Military Friendly® Schools for the 2021-2022 academic year:

Figure 1

Illustration of Military Friendly® Schools' Gold Standard



Table 1 shows this data in a matrix fashion.

Table 1

Seven Kentucky Institutions of Higher Learning That Are Listed as Military Friendly®

Schools For 2022-2023:

School	Type	Location	Award
University of the Cumberlands	Private Offering Doctorate	KY	Gold
Morehead State University	Small Public	KY	Gold
University of Louisville	Tier 1 Research	KY	Gold
This Comprehensive Mid-Sized Regional University	Large Public	KY	Silver
Eastern Kentucky University	Large Public	KY	Top Ten
Campbellsville University	Private Offering Doctorate	KY	Silver
Western Kentucky University	Large Public	KY	Gold

This dissertation explores whether this comprehensive mid-sized regional university could tailor a specific recruitment and retention strategy to attract more student veterans with Ft. Campbell and Ft. Knox within the comprehensive mid-sized regional university's geographical sphere of influence. Specifically, it will explore how a comprehensive mid-sized regional university should target this demographic and become a quality institution that educates veterans. Especially veterans in the graduate and postgraduate programs. Realizing there is a virtually never-ending supply of military personnel exiting the service each year that can be captured, higher education leaders and administrators must consider this potential seriously.

Most exiting service members will be eligible for VA financial and educational benefits. Nursing, Education, and English are all areas that current and former military personnel are attracted to (Young, 2021). This premise leads to constructing this dissertation on how a

comprehensive mid-sized regional university can attract and retain higher-level education veteran students in the graduate and postgraduate arenas. It is imperative to capture the best practices and share such knowledge and data to enhance the knowledge and awareness of future student veterans coming to a comprehensive mid-sized regional university.

Summary

In reviewing the literature, several thematic tones arose that were noteworthy in the context of this study. A key revelation is that a subtle undertone of moral responsibility was realized repeatedly in reviewing the available literature. After over ten years of teaching at higher education institutions, it dawned upon the reviewer that this is a universal truth. Our country promises military members the opportunity to receive a quality higher education at virtually no cost in return for the services rendered to the country. Often, this service requires combat and risking one's life.

Another pattern that arose during this literature review is that student veterans are often not psychologically ready to transition from a highly disciplined military life to an extremely undisciplined academic life. The general environment of many students not taking their college duties seriously and not being part of a team effort to achieve a mission alienates a student veteran.

Another theme from this literature review is a plethora of literature describing how to set up a college campus program to deal with student veterans' transition from military life to campus life. The extant literature is replete with ways to set up a campus to deal with student veteran success; moreover, many government agencies, offices, programs, and support agencies are available for help.

This literature review revealed that veterans who helped other veterans in an academic environment tend to lessen the transition's impact. 'Softening the blow' by providing some familiarity with a new environment is extremely helpful to student veterans. This theme includes research showing that most student veterans or potential student veterans either do not start college or do not graduate from college using their benefits. This is a lost revenue stream for the college or university and a lost knowledge base for the country. Both need to be recaptured and assured of success. Many veterans could quickly graduate from college if there is some modicum of support structure available to them while they go to school. The literature strongly suggests that any college or university with student veterans creates a veteran-friendly campus.

This literature review also uncovered the importance of a strategic/military mindset and the availability of military-friendly schools. (Young, 2021) recommends that every college and university aspire to be included on this list. (Young, 2021) also recommends that each of these colleges or universities aspire to climb higher on the ratings each year by improving their military and student veterans support initiatives. This listing means a higher flow of money to the school, which can become an attractive proposition for student veterans. This dissertation will examine how a comprehensive mid-sized regional university could go from simply military-friendly to ranking top-ten and gold standard military-friendly, especially by attracting more graduate and postgraduate students into this comprehensive mid-sized regional university's professional degree programs.

In conclusion, there are more potential military or student veterans as a resource pool than those veterans participating in college or university degree programs. This is something that none of the books in the above literature review have discussed in the context of student veterans. This must be rectified because everyone wins when our veterans achieve formal

education. Our country made an academic promise to our veterans, which needs to be kept, to educate these national treasures called student veterans.

Chapter III: Methodology

Before beginning any credible study effort, framing a defensible rationale for conducting a qualitative study with a phenomenological focus must be completed. Next, an investigation of the approach to the research design and subsequent plan to utilize and detail the sampling methods for a phenomenological study will be considered. The following section describes the study setting and the role of the researcher in gathering data. Next, an examination of the criteria used to select interviewees will be described. Finally, a delineation of the various systems used for data collection and storage to ensure the integrity of our methodologies will be accomplished.

Once these facets of our study are understood, the appropriate research questions can be asked to help us answer the Grand Tour question of this study. Finally, this chapter discusses the ethical control measures used to ensure Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines were maintained while using the specific instruments and procedures to perform this study. Subsequently, a description of the statistical tools applied to analyze and measure all data used in this research will be accomplished.

Research Design

Creswell (2001) delineates five distinct approaches to conducting qualitative studies in human and social science research: ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological, and narrative. Creswell explains that each of these five approaches collects, organizes, and analyzes data in a particular fashion. He states that researchers must carefully select the approach that best suits their specific and unique study. Phenomenological approaches make it possible to examine human experiences through detailed descriptions of the people being

studied. The researcher chose to understand the lived experiences of phenomenology. The researcher “bracketed” his own experiences to understand those of the student veteran participants.

Purpose of the Study

It is quite possible for a veteran to obtain a college degree completely free of charge and even receive a substantial living stipend while attending college. As a case in point, in the Murray, Kentucky area, all vets attending college at this comprehensive mid-sized regional university receive a Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rate of approximately \$1,100.00 a month while attending college. This stipend is in addition to the Veterans Administration (VA) paying qualified veterans’ full tuition, books, fees, and miscellaneous expenses. This point is to show the reader the immense value to the student veteran and the university in recruiting veterans to attend undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs at a comprehensive mid-sized regional university or any other college.

This value includes but is not limited to professional certification, professional degrees, master’s degrees, and doctoral-level degrees for our study purposes. The author is a doctoral candidate at this comprehensive mid-sized regional university using Veterans Administration Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits to obtain his EdD. The impetus is to ensure that other veterans who may already have an undergraduate degree or are pursuing an undergraduate degree continue their educational pursuits.

Whether paying for their education privately or utilizing the VA benefits offered to them, the impetus is to enhance their lives, continue their lifelong learning experiences, and continue serving their country by utilizing and leveraging their unique knowledge, skills, and abilities. Against this backdrop, the current study examines how a comprehensive mid-sized regional

university can leverage this dissertation to increase its enrollment of student veterans seeking a graduate or postgraduate degree. The study was conducted at a Regional University, and the lessons learned are transportable to other similar universities.

Research Questions

The researcher used interviews, in-depth questionnaires, observations, and mailers to collect detailed data from student veterans who had been awarded an undergraduate degree for this study and to formulate research questions. The researcher used three research questions to steer and guide each subject to reveal answers to the Grand Research question.

Grand tour question: How can this comprehensive mid-sized regional university attract and graduate more graduate and postgraduate student veterans?

Research question 1: What transition (military to college life) factors do you feel should be addressed to ensure success in graduating student veterans?

Research question 2: What financial aid vehicles are student veterans currently using to attend graduate school at this comprehensive mid-sized regional university?

Research question 3: Which advocacy programs have you experienced most effectively in helping student veterans achieve successful graduation?

Description of Participants

After obtaining approval from the comprehensive mid-sized regional university's IRB to conduct this phenomenological study, the researcher began to recruit appropriate participants from the pool of veteran students already at the comprehensive mid-sized regional university engaged in undergraduate studies. Next, the Veteran Student Organization (VSO) was utilized to

obtain a list of veteran students at Murray State Pursuing a graduate or postgraduate degree. The VSO was also utilized to obtain alumni records of student veterans for interview purposes. Next local Veteran Support and Service groups were contacted to identify relevant participants. These included:

- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 6291 Murray Kentucky
- American Legion Murray Kentucky
- VFW Auxiliary
- American Legion Auxiliary
- The Comprehensive Mid-Sized Regional University's Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC).
- The Comprehensive Mid-Sized Regional University's Veteran Alumni

Description of Sampling Procedures

Initial interviews were held at the researcher's office or other mutually agreed upon location. When in-person interviews were not feasible, ZOOM sessions were conducted and recorded. Each student veteran interviewed signed an Informed Consent Form before the interviews and retained a hard copy for their records. During the interviews, there were no distractions, unsafe, threatening, or unpleasant conditions. The author obtained the consent of each interviewee to have their interviews recorded using an application on his mobile device (phone or iPad) via Zoom. None of the interviews exceeded 30 minutes. Immediately following the interviews, transcriptions were completed, and all recordings were purged of delineating or personal identifying information. All raw and original data were locked on a password-protected laptop computer and will remain for two years. Audio recordings were destroyed immediately

after the following transcription, and associated applications were uninstalled from the researcher's mobile devices used for this study.

A grand tour question and three open-ended research questions (with sub-tier supporting questions) were formulated to allow participants to respond in several ways to each question presented. The impetus is to delineate what to understand from the interviewee by knowing what questions to ask to obtain that understanding. Practical research and interview questions require creativity, insight, and purpose (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher wanted to avoid rote or automated answers that lacked genuineness and thought. Interviews were conducted whenever feasible and allowable to collect a wider variety of detailed information. Additionally, the researcher wanted to observe the participants' nonverbal language, body motions and cues, and participants' verbal language such as tone, pitch, articulation, and volume during each interview, which is not possible with surveys alone.

Another reason for utilizing interviews and other sampling methods was that the researcher knew that interviews were appropriate and acceptable forms of research in the country. Conducting interviews is a common practice for obtaining data and asking questions of willing participants (Maxwell, 2013) most people in the United States are familiar with and comfortable doing.

Description of Risks

Data analysis for phenomenology uses in-depth interviews of people who have experienced a particular shared phenomenon. In the case of this study, the participants were all veterans who had obtained a baccalaureate or higher degree. Conducting in vivo interview sessions with participants was lengthy and time-consuming. However, it helped the researcher incorporate the interview's nonverbal data into this study. Each interviewee was provided with a

transcribed document of their specific interview for verification and sent and received data accurately and in the proper context. This ensured the integrity of the data, the responses, and the ultimate interpretations.

Inherent risks of conducting this phenomenological study include triggering past traumatic incidents or reliving unpleasant memories. Additionally, the risk involved with this type of study, like qualitative studies, risks leaving necessary metadata out by labeling said datum as leftover or miscellaneous (Saldaña, 2021). There is also the inherent risk of becoming too enamored with one's data sets and unwilling to modify them. When this occurs, there are risks of trying to fit qualitative data into a set of codes and categories that may not apply to the study one is conducting.

There is a real risk for non-veteran researchers being stonewalled or given inaccurate or no data based on the researcher's perceived credibility and experience in the eyes of the student veteran. This is unique because student veterans are reluctant to discuss details of their experiences with those they deem "having no clue" of what they have gone through to acquire a higher education credential.

Student veterans often approach higher education with grit and a mindset of mission accomplishment which can risk them successfully graduating (Davis, 2020). To re-focus the veteran to approach higher education as a lifelong learning experience to be enjoyed and discovered is not the intent of this study. Instead, how to recruit student veterans into graduate and Postgraduate degree programs at a comprehensive regional university to gain better fidelity.

Finally, the risk of miscoding one's data sets is always present. For this study, the author used a two-cycle coding process to code for patterns and themes and more specific qualitative

categories to eliminate the risk of bias and assumptions. The author tried to use preliminary data on the subject, but little was available.

Voluntary Participation, Confidentiality, and Assured Anonymity

According to Maxwell (2013), researchers should always protect the identity and well-being of their participants or subjects. That is why the researcher emphasized the importance of following ethical standards when conducting this qualitative study on student veterans seeking a graduate or Postgraduate degree at a comprehensive mid-sized regional university. The researcher of this phenomenological study ensured participant anonymity by incorporating and assigning each subject a pseudonym and a numerical tag. Additionally, the researcher avoided referencing a specific person or location during the interview and data collection sessions.

Procedures for Data Analysis and Integrity

Validity and Reliability

This qualitative research addressed the traditional subjects of validity and reliability by framing the concepts within the thematic tones that emerged from the participant's recorded data. Further, the primary researcher triangulated and looked for convergence among all the sources of feedback and information. The interview questions were constructed with some redundancy to ensure topics were adequately covered. The researcher solicited direct input from the participants on the themes the data revealed. (Creswell, 2001).

The primary researcher shared the transcripts of each participant's interview with them to seek the validity of the data findings. A summary of the generalized data findings was shared with all the participants to ascertain the validity and reliability of the reported findings further. Finally, the primary researcher addressed the issue of researcher bias. The primary researcher remained conscious of the fact he is a combat student veteran. The primary researcher tried to

purposely avoid any bias or influence that lent distortion to the results of this study by accomplishing the actions mentioned above. These actions were done to achieve an understanding of this phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell, 2001).

Coding

For this study's analytical purposes, coding was accomplished by placing data into recorded and measured categories. The data for this study was recorded as either an ordinal or nominal variable or sometimes both. In this study, the author used six coding methods (in Vivo, Process, Initial, Focused, Axial, and Theoretical Coding (Saldaña, 2021).

In vivo and process coding are facets of the first-cycle coding, whereby data is split into individually coded segments. Second-cycle coding entails the Focused, Axial, and theoretical stages of data analysis. This process constantly compares, reorganizes, and focuses codes into categories and then prioritizes them to develop "axis" categories which can be formulated into a core category that becomes the foundation for the explication of a grounded theory (Saldaña, 2021). Though this study is qualitative and phenomenological, the axial coding process elements proved helpful in studying data collected on student veterans at a comprehensive mid-sized regional university.

The researcher assigned each participant a numerical value to identify the subject during this study. Each survey was broken down, transcribed, analyzed, and processed to generate specific categories. The research revealed the prevalence of five main (core categories) affecting the recruitment of student veterans at a comprehensive regional university. This data was further subdivided into subcategories to glean similarities and differences in the collected data and responses. This data was then analyzed to ascertain and construct the actual meaning of the data and responses.

The researcher took note of the relationship between the five categories. Several themes and patterns emerged within and amongst those categories. Chapters IV and V show the reader these thematic interpretations of the data and the relevancy of this phenomenological study.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

An interpretive phenomenological analysis is used (IPA) when researchers want to understand their collective data findings further or better. Splitting data using an IPA approach assures a more accurate comparison among data categories and data subcategories. Using the research questions to frame our study, the researcher used IPA to generate complete and detailed descriptions of each participant's educational experiences. Applying two-cycle coding to include in vivo coding, axial coding, and IPA, the researcher, was able to phenomenologically code data, create comprehensive and usable categorical and sub-categorical spreadsheets, and identify themes and trends in the data revealed from the study participants.

This chapter presented information about the purpose of the study, a description of the subjects and participants, data collection instruments, data security plans, and detailed procedures for the data analysis supporting this qualitative research study. The interpretations of this qualitative study on recruiting more student veterans into graduate programs at comprehensive regional universities merit future study by researchers.

Chapter IV: Research Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the findings from data collected and analyzed of 12 student veterans attending graduate school, planning to attend graduate school, or who have already graduated from graduate school at a comprehensive regional mid-sized public university or its equivalent. This research study aimed to explore student veterans' perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and experiences seeking a graduate or postgraduate degree. The researcher asked various questions to help the reader understand the research participants and their backgrounds. Participants spoke for themselves; these responses are in quotations throughout this chapter. Quotes provide the reader with rich content. Quotes support or disconfirm the student veterans' varied perspectives on the issues and topics addressed in these findings (Creswell, 2001).

Interview Participants

Two females and ten males aged 25 to 65 were interviewed for this phenomenological study. The participants ranged in ethnicity as well as age. Eight participants were Caucasian, three were Hispanic, and one was of mixed ethnicity (Hispanic, Native American, and Black) but identified as primarily Hispanic. Each student veteran held a minimum of a bachelor's degree and was either currently serving on active duty, had been separated from the active-duty military, or was retired from an active-duty career of 20 or more years. All the participants served on active duty ranging from three to 26 years. Seven participants were married, and five were single or divorced. Ten participants in this research survey were students or alumni of the comprehensive mid-sized regional university. Each of these ten students used the university's student Veteran Association for help and support. Six of the participants were service-disabled veterans. Nine participants had experienced combat, while three never saw combat duty. Two participants did not use any veterans' educational benefits. One research participant was a doctoral candidate.

Four of the 12 participants accomplished an entire 20-year (or more) career as a military member and are receiving a military pension.

To ensure anonymity, the researcher identified participants of this study in the following manner: Student veteran 1 (SV1) through student veteran (SV12).

Student veteran 1 (SV1) is a 25-year-old single Black Hispanic and Native American male who was recently promoted to first lieutenant. SV1 received a bachelor's degree in Korean languages and culture and serves as a foreign area officer on active duty in the Air Force. He has been on active duty for two and a half years. SV1 has not performed a combat tour.

Student veteran 2 (SV2) was an enlisted Army sergeant who spent 13 years on active duty before becoming permanently disabled. SV2 is a Caucasian male who performed combat tours in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, and other locations before becoming disabled. SV2 has bachelor's and master's degrees and is working on his doctoral degree in education full-time. SV2 is in his late 30s, single (divorced), and a full-time doctoral student. SV2 is classified as 100% disabled by the United States government.

Student veteran 3 (SV3) was an Army armor and cavalry officer for seven years. SV3 performed combat tours in Iraq and other locations in the Middle East. SV3 is a 50-year-old married Caucasian male. He works as an IT and telecommunications professional. SV3 is active in veteran service organizations on the local, state, and national levels.

Student veteran 4 (SV4) is an active-duty Army warrant officer in the air defense career field. SV4 is a Hispanic male married with no children and has nine years of total active service. SV4 is a first-generation college graduate and attributes his academic success to his love of lifelong learning, and the opportunities afforded him by the US military. SV4 has not performed any combat missions in his nine years of service.

Student veteran 5 (SV5) was an enlisted Army soldier (sergeant) on active duty for six years. SV5 was an aviation mechanic with several combat tours to Iraq. SV5 is a single father (divorced) of two children and is currently a cyber security specialist at a defense contracting company. SV5 is pursuing an MBA at this comprehensive regional mid-sized university while working. SV5 plans to use his leftover GI Bill to accomplish his degree.

Student veteran 6 (SV6) is a 45-year-old divorced Hispanic female who performed 20 years of active-duty service in the United States Air Force. SV6 attained the rank of master sergeant. She performed duties in the information technology and medical fields and had two combat deployments to Iraq and Kuwait. SV6 retired from active duty, collecting a pension, and is a service-disabled veteran.

Student veteran 7 (SV7) is a Caucasian male, married with two children, and 80% disabled. He was a United States Marine sergeant who entered the Corps as a musician but ended his career as a heavy-duty mechanic. SV7 completed several combat tours in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East before being injured on active duty. He was medically retired early with 13 years of total service. SV7 desired to make the Marine Corps an entire 20-year career. He is a full-time student working on his graduate degree.

Student veteran 8 (SV8) was an Air Force sergeant for six years on active duty. SV8 served combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. SV8 is a middle-aged Caucasian male, single with no children. He is in good physical shape and has no disabilities. SV8 is working on his CPA certifications and wants to be a certified public accountant.

Student veteran 9 (SV9) is a 65-year-old retired United States Air Force colonel. He is a divorced Caucasian male with no children. SV12 spent 26 years on active duty and served several combat tours in Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Korea, and other locations

worldwide. SV12 has two master's degrees and is considering pursuing a doctoral degree. He has no significant disabilities because of his military service.

Student veteran 10 (SV10) is a female first sergeant (MSGT) in the Army. She is currently on active duty and has served 16 years to date. SV10 has performed duties as a heavy-duty mechanic and logistics specialist. SV10 has served three combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. SV10 is married with children and plans to pursue a doctorate or other terminal degree before she leaves active duty.

Student veteran 11 (SV11) SV11 was a 20-year Navy career, senior chief petty officer. SV11, in his forties, is a Caucasian male and married with children. SV11 is currently pursuing his doctoral degree in education. SV11 did not perform any combat tours during his military career. He has no significant physical disabilities because of his military service and is currently working as a junior Naval ROTC instructor at a high school. SV11 desires to be a high school principal upon completing his doctorate.

Student veteran 12 (SV12) is a 46-year-old retired Air Force master sergeant. SV12 spent 26 years total on active duty. SV12 performed two combat tours to Iraq and one combat tour in Qatar. SV12 was a satellite communications controller and cyber security expert in the military. Table 2 below presents this research study's collected demographic data in tabular form:

Table 2*Participant Demographic Profiles*

SV#	Gender	Rank	Years	Branch	Combat	Ethnicity	Age	Married
SV1	Male	1Lt.	3*	USAF	N	H/N/B	25	No
SV2	Male	SGT	13	Army	Y	C	35	Divorced
SV3	Male	CPT	7	Army	Y	C	50	Yes
SV4	Male	WO2	9*	Army	N	H	30	Yes
SV5	Male	SGT	6	Army	Y	C	33	Divorced
SV6	Female	MSgt.**	20	USAF	Y	H	45	Divorced
SV7	Male	SSGT	13	Marines	Y	C	32	Yes
SV8	Male	Sgt.	6	USAF	Y	C	29	No
SV9	Male	Col.**	26	USAF	Y	C	65	Divorced
SV10	Female	1SG	16*	USA	Y	H	44	Yes
SV11	Male	SCPO**	20	USN	N	C	43	Yes
SV12	Male	MSgt.**	26	USAF	Y	C	46	Yes

Note. *AD – Currently Serving on Active Duty

**Retired after a 20-year career

C Caucasian
H Hispanic
B Black
N Native American

Research Questions

All 12 participants described their experiences and were entirely at ease and comfortable with the researcher. The researcher conducted one face-to-face interview because that student veteran was unfamiliar with the necessary technology to perform a Zoom call. Due to social distancing precautions and advisories recommended by the university resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the intent to record the interviews, the remaining 11 interviews took place via Zoom calls on a desktop computer or tablet. Any requisite follow-up questions were done via e-mail or text messaging so they could be recorded on the student veteran's interview transcript. All the interviews took place during October and November of 2022. All participants

were asked the same interview questions regarding their preparation, motivation, disposition, and transition from undergraduate to graduate studies.

All interviewees' names, personally identifying data, and personal characteristics were extracted to protect their confidentiality and to ensure the participants' anonymity. In-depth data from student veteran interviews directly addresses this study's research questions. The study was guided by a grand tour question and three supporting research questions.

Grand tour question:

How can more student veterans be recruited to graduate and postgraduate programs at mid-sized regional universities?

Research question 1:

What understanding of military to college transition factors do student veterans possess?

Research question 2:

To what extent do financial resources impact student veterans' graduate or postgraduate pursuits?

Research question 3:

What are student veterans' perceptions of educational advocacy programs?

The researcher developed 20 supporting interview questions (Appendix D) to ask the student veterans to derive and ascertain answers to the grand tour question. Each question was open-ended to allow participants to expand upon their answers or elaborate as they felt necessary. The primary researcher built slight redundancy into the interview script to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. The primary researcher provided interview questions to each participant in this research study by the primary researcher upon submission of the signed

consent form. This was done to allow participants time to process the questions and avoid any potential discomfort on their part.

Graduate School Preparation

The researcher asked the participants eight questions about their graduate or postgraduate work preparation. The researcher asked each student veteran to reflect upon their perceptions of advanced degrees before continuing their graduate education.

Question 1: Do you feel you were ready to enter graduate school?

Half (six) of the research survey participants responded they were not prepared for graduate school when they entered, and the other half responded they were either ready or extremely ready to enter grad school. For example, SV2 stated he was prepared to enter graduate school because he had worked in higher education for several years and knew how to navigate the higher education system of a comprehensive mid-sized regional university. Conversely, SV7 said he was not ready; he was “terrified because it had been so long,” and he felt “too old to go back to school, much less at the graduate level.” Likewise, SV12 stated he was not ready but took the plunge because he felt “time was running out for him to use his GI bill benefits.”

SV1 stated, “ready or not, do it and get the courage later. Best if GIs go as soon as possible after their undergrad to not lose currency and relevancy and they are in the groove of being in an academic environment.” SV4 echoed student veteran 1’s sentiment and stated, “Hell no, I just did it quickly and efficiently, so I didn’t break stride.”

Question 2: How did you prepare for graduate school?

Approximately one-quarter of interviewed respondents said they did not prepare and started graduate school when they got the first opportunity. For example, SV6 stated, “I didn’t prepare. I just dove right in. Like going to combat, I did it then I got the courage later. I just

knew I should do it, so I did it.” Similarly, SV4 said he transitioned directly into graduate school within six months of receiving his baccalaureate degree. SV4 noted he did not formerly prepare other than to follow the directions he saw online about how to go on to get his master’s degree.

Conversely, most student veterans did prepare. SV10 said she was very organized in selecting a grad school. SV10 stated:

“I looked up schools offering agriculture and earth science grad degrees, and this comprehensive mid-sized university had a similar major and the best reviews from former students. I went to the College Scorecard for graduate schools and saw this university had a high-quality rating.”

This indicates that online rankings and ratings significantly affect student veteran graduate school selection. This includes the military-friendly schools rating index mentioned in Chapter III. SV8 prepared by taking the GRE, looking at available schools online to see where he would qualify, ensuring they had his major, applying, and then being accepted.

Question 3: What influenced your decision to continue to graduate school?

Answers to this question by survey participants were clustered around three primary responses: to better my professional career, to make me more competitive in my job (more promotable, more money, better position), and because I am a life-long learner. For example, SV3 stated, “getting my grad degree will separate me from the pack and open more doors for me.” Likewise, SV5 stated, “I need a grad degree to make more money in this tight economy.” SV11 said that, first and foremost, he considered himself a veteran and then a life-long learner and that being a student veteran with VA Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, he was “definitely taking advantage of a free education.”

SV4 stated the same when he responded that he considers himself a life-long learner and will pursue a terminal degree. He plans on being a professor when he retires. SV7 stated that the VA encouraged him to take advantage of his VA educational benefits under the vocational rehabilitation chapter for veterans with disabilities. SV7 said, “the VA reached out to me to use my vocational rehab benefits to return to college. I couldn’t believe it. They even followed up and helped me with all the necessary paperwork!”

Question 4: How did you pay for your [graduate] degree?

This question evoked the strongest and quickest replies of all the questions asked. For example, Eighty percent of respondents stated the VA and the Post-9/11 GI Bills were paying for their graduate degrees. Only two student veterans (SV3 and SV9) did not use VA educational benefits to obtain their advanced degrees. This was because they did not qualify for any VA educational benefits due to the timing of active-duty service. Three student veterans initially paid out-of-pocket because of delays in processing paperwork through the VA. However, they soon engaged their earned benefits to have most of their graduate education covered by the VA.

Five of the respondents in this survey stated they were receiving supplemental scholarships to help pay for their grad school. Still, those scholarships were small in comparison to the VA educational benefits. Uniquely, the university where this study was conducted provides a stipend to active-duty military personnel to cover any difference in tuition assistance - about 20% - that the Department of Defense does not cover. This provides additional incentive for active-duty military personnel to attend that university.

Question 5: What financial programs are you aware of to help student veterans pay for graduate school?

Most of the student veterans surveyed stated they were not aware of other financial aid programs to help them with their graduate degrees. The university mandates all students to complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Additionally, the university encourages all students to complete and submit a scholarship application on its intranet portal. All student veterans surveyed stated they were familiar with the VA GI Bills, tuition assistance, student loans, and scholarships. For example, SV8 said he knew graduate teaching assistants could earn money to finance their advanced degree pursuits. Two student veterans, SV7 and SV8, were aware that community VSOs like the VFW and the American Legion offered scholarships. Ten of the 12 student veterans interviewed stated they utilize the university's Student Veteran Office to help them navigate the process of paying for college.

The consensus amongst most of the student veterans survey is that the only thing they need to be concerned with for paying for grad school is their VA benefits and no other financial sources. And because their VA benefits cover most, if not all, of their expenses. The government made a deal to educate them if they served in the military. Awareness of other non-VA educational benefits seemed sparse.

Question 6: Which financial resources did you use to obtain your degree?

When asked which specific vehicles each student veteran used to pay for their graduate degree, all but two, SV3 and SV9, stated they used some form of the GI Bill (Montgomery, Post-9/11/ Forever). Most used the Post 9/11 GI Bill. For example, two of the ten, SV2 and SV6, used GI Bill Vocational Rehabilitation Chapter benefits because of injuries sustained in combat. While most student veterans reported some percentage of disabilities due to service-connected incidents, only SV2 and SV6 were severe enough to qualify for the Vocational Rehabilitation Chapter. Two student veterans, SV7 and SV 10 were utilizing FAFSA funds to supplement their

GI Bills, and two student veterans, SV7 and SV8, were using scholarships and graduate assistantships to supplement their VA educational benefits for graduate school.

Two student veterans, SV3 and SV9, used no GI Bill benefits at all due to not being eligible for any VA benefits when they decided to graduate school. These two student veterans used corporate educational programs, their funds, student loans, scholarships, grants, and need-based financing from various federal, state, and local entities.

Question 7: What made you want to attend graduate school?

This question evoked the most robust and positive responses from the survey participants in this research project. This question drew the longest and most detailed response among research participants. Each participant liked relaying their motivation to attend graduate school. Again, the answers clustered around three primary themes: to better my life and the life of my family (more money, more opportunities, and better work-life balance), to make myself more competitive and relevant for my career (to include not relying on others to make my living or in starting my own small business), and for the sheer joy of continuing to learn and grow. For example, SV11 stated, “I am proud of myself, and my family is proud of me. I am the first person in my family to complete college.”

SV8 stated he loves learning, and with the advent of online learning, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), distance learning, and similar mediums, he can study and learn from anywhere and almost at any time he chooses. One student veteran said, “I had no choice but to return to school. I couldn’t find meaningful work, my family needed a better life, and it paid more to go back to school and receive my E-5 BAH.” Regardless of the motivation, the VA educational benefits promised each service member using them pushed them over the top to start pursuing their graduate educations.

Question 8: What other programs do you feel should be available to help student veterans succeed in graduate school?

These questions elicited a wide-ranging set of answers. Since student veterans are usually older, more experienced in geopolitical endeavors, and more independent than traditional students, these answers provide insight into the everyday problems encountered by most student veterans. SV1 stated that national, state and local VSOs need to do more outreach and awareness efforts. For example, SV6 suggested this information be taught to active-duty military members before they leave the military. SV8 suggested a “kicker” be added to all the available GI Bills to address going to graduate school. That is not just using the GI Bill for a baccalaureate. Especially in today’s modern Post WWII world.

The most received response to this question, seven of the 12 replies, mentioned that the VA or the university offers some “primer or boot camp” courses on how to become a successful graduate student. For example, the issues to cover in a preparatory course of this type would include but not be limited to navigating the application process, learning what the VSOs can do to help student veterans, veteran advocacy programs, counseling programs for vets going to grad school, expectations for older students, cross-generational study environments, writing 101 for veterans to learn college approaches, and paid internships for veterans.

Motivating Factors for Attending Graduate School

The researcher asked the participants six questions about the motivating factors that led them to seek a graduate degree. Each participant was asked to examine their social, emotional, mental, physical, and financial state when they decided to attend graduate school and the external factors that motivated them to go to graduate school. The participants were asked to rate their academic and life experiences using the following scale: excellent, good, average, and poor. For

example, SV1 stated, “my classes were fun and interesting but registering and navigating the administrative part of graduate school is frustrating.” SV2 stated, “the sheer amount of diversity in graduate school brought so many different opinions and perspectives from so many different backgrounds.” Several student veterans including SV3, SV6, SV8, and SV11 stated

“My professors are all very smart, and many are experts in their fields. However, many have no experience in the outside world like I do, so it can be hard to directly relate to them. But I’ve learned a lot about new things and new concepts.”

Question 1: Describe your physical health when you decided to attend grad school?

Seven of the 12 participants surveyed stated their health was either excellent or good when they entered grad school. For example, three student veterans said they would rate their health at the time of entrance to grad school as average, and two stated their health was poor at best. Of the two student veterans who indicated their health was poor at the time of grad school entrance, one is 100% disabled by the VA. The other is 80% disabled, according to the VA. Both students stated, “online classes are the way to go for me because I cannot sit in a traditional classroom environment all day.”

Question 2: Describe your mental health when pursuing your graduate degree.

The primary researcher cautiously approached this question because of the unknown triggers it might activate. One-half (six) of the survey respondents said their mental health at the time of entering grad school was “stable” to “paranoid and worried.” The other four student veterans in this group used the word “stressed” to describe their mental health while in graduate school. For example, five of the student veterans surveyed stated their mental health was good,

but that work-life balance took a mental toll over the time spent in graduate school. As academic demands became heavier, so did family obligations.

A constant balancing act of priorities occurred as these student veterans traversed their graduate educations. SV11 brought up a salient point that all student veterans had an undertone of similarity. His mental health is good, and staying robust because of his iron-will gleaned from military service. However, the reality is that iron-will wears down the machine over time. The challenge becomes keeping a solid will and a positive attitude over the long haul.

Question 3: Describe your financial health when you chose to apply for grad school?

All but one of the 12 student veterans reported that their financial health was average to good when they started graduate school. For example, of the 11 students that reported an average or good rating of financial health, most stated it was because they were older, more stable, had savings, knew how to budget, and that the VA GI Bill or other VA programs had lifted the financial worry of paying for college off them. Several student veterans responded that they were working, could work part-time, or that their spouses were working and providing extra income.

The one student veteran who responded that their financial health was “hard” said it was due to being physically disabled, single, unable to work, and having to attend physical rehabilitation. This student veteran did have a small retirement due to their disability from military service, but it was not adequate to cover all expenses.

Question 4: Describe your emotional health when you decided to enter graduate school?

Seven of the 12 student veterans surveyed in this research project described their mental health at the time of graduate school entrance as average or good. For example, two student

veterans, SV3 and SV8, cited their spiritual belief systems to their good mental health. One described his good emotional health as being resilient and still alive. The other four student veterans in this group stated they were simply grateful for the opportunity to better themselves and to be with their families in a safe and secure environment.

The other five of the 12 survey respondents stated their emotional health at the time of starting graduate school was poor. All said they were constantly stressed and anxious. One survey respondent said they need therapy on an ongoing basis to stay emotionally sound (a holdover from active combat service). Four in this group said that returning to an on-campus college environment was a tough adjustment and felt they were stigmatized for being ex-military.

Question 5: What (if any) external factors assisted your decision to pursue a graduate degree?

Half of the respondents (six of the 12 surveyed) stated that their family members prompted them to pursue a graduate degree. Specifically, their spouse, siblings, or parents. For example, SV3 said, “Watching my wife’s success in her graduate degree pursuits motivated me to go to grad school also.” SV11 reported that his spouse “constantly encouraged him to pursue a graduate degree to the point he did it.” Two student veterans in this group said they had immediate family members active in higher education at the graduate level or were teaching at the graduate level and were encouraged to follow in their footsteps. SV1 said, “I have other family members getting advanced degrees and teaching in higher education. I am somewhat expected to go on to grad school myself.”

Four student veterans responded to this question by simply stating the economy and poor job prospects were the external factors that made them decide to pursue a graduate degree. And two student veterans said it was not an external stimulus but rather an internal one that drove them to pursue a graduate curriculum.

Question 6: What aspects of the transition process from undergraduate to graduate school would you change to make future student veterans' experience a smoother event?

Answers to this interview question varied in frequency and type of response. Many new solutions and data points not noticed yet in the survey process appeared when this question was posed. For example, ten of the 12 respondents stated that future student veterans should not “go it alone” and utilize best practices and lessons learned from previous student veterans. Two student veterans specifically said that, in retrospect, they should not have taken such an extended break from academia and pursued their graduate degrees within one year of receiving their baccalaureate. Two student veterans, SV3 and SV12, mentioned that they should've taken advantage of the available online course while they were transitioning. Online courses keep one's study skills sharp and afford the learner in transition greater flexibility.

Two student veterans mentioned that future student veterans must realize they are adding to the body of knowledge for all graduate students coming into grad school behind them. The best way to bond cross-generational barriers is to share the quest for new knowledge. Two student veterans mentioned that sanctioned military transition assistance programs should include a section on higher educational transition to make the seminars more effective. The remaining four student veteran responses included adding an internship between degrees for vets, taking more extended breaks between degrees, seeking VSO help for getting a grad degree, and one student veteran mentioned they thought the process was fine as it stands.

Transition to Graduate School

The researcher asked the student veterans six questions about their transition from undergraduate to graduate studies. Each student veteran reflected on their transition's social,

emotional, physical, financial, and mental health issues in this interview section. Questions asked were slightly redundant to ensure validity and reliability.

Question 1: When you decided to go to grad school, what social issues did you experience?

Answers to this question were varied again but centered on two main thematic cores: first, the undertone that civilian graduate students and teachers have no idea of the world from which student veterans (especially combat veterans) come. Additionally, these civilian students and professors could care less about that world. This perception seemed prevalent in the minds of most of the student veterans surveyed. The second theme noticed in the student veteran's answer to this question was academia's very liberal and unstructured environment. For example, one student veteran stated they could not bear to see a student come to class late, casually dressed, unprepared, and aloof. This runs counter to the disciplined environment of the military.

The primary researcher noticed several student veterans saying they were afraid to go back to a college campus because the structured academic realm was alien to them. Not that it would be demanding; instead, they would be an outsider. Several student veterans broached the issue of diversity. Specifically, that diversity on a college campus is centered around individual groups or classes. In contrast, in the military, diversity is (or was) structured around the separate pieces used to forge the entire team for the focus on the same or common mission.

Question 2: When you decided to apply for graduate school, what emotional issues did you experience?

Several of the student veterans Surveyed were excited to be achieving new heights by going to grad school. For example, four surveyed respondents stated they felt stigmatized for being ex-military, but that stigma eventually subsided with time spent with their respective cohorts. Two student veterans, SV3 and SV12, said their faith remained their best ally through

grad school and helped them avoid undue stress. Every respondent in this research project stated they were stressed, anxious, afraid, or hesitant at some point in their graduate school endeavors. In short, other than the stigma of being ex-military, student veterans experience the same emotions as other students reflected in the available literature.

Question 3: When you decided to apply for graduate school, what physical issues did you experience?

Sixty percent of the 12 participants said their health was not a factor in determining whether to go to grad school or go to classes. For example, only two student veterans, SV2 and SV12, started their health was poor when they decided to go to graduate school. Both student veterans are permanently disabled because of their military service. As diagnosed by the VA, one student veteran is 100% disabled, and the other is 80% disabled. Both disabled student veterans were grateful for the opportunity to take most of their classes online.

Question 4: When you decided to apply for graduate school, what financial issues did you experience?

Eleven of the 12 student veterans reported their financial health was not stressful or in jeopardy when they started graduate school. Most stated it was because they were older, more stable, had savings, knew how to budget, and that the VA GI Bill or other VA programs had lifted the financial worry of paying for college off them. For example, SV10 stated their financial situation when they entered graduate school “was better than when I entered my undergraduate studies.” Two primary themes arose around this question and related financial questions. The VA is slow to pay but eventually pays all outstanding remunerations. The VA GI Bill, tuition assistance, vocational rehab, and other financial assistance benefit programs made pursuing a higher education possible for all but two of the respondents.

Question 5: How did family and friends react to your decision to go to graduate school?

Student veterans surveyed in this research study overwhelmingly stated that their family and friends were very supportive and very positive about them attending graduate school. Especially first-generation college students who family members view as pioneers in their families. This includes spouses, siblings, children, parents, and non-nuclear family members. For example, only one student veteran, SV7, reported that their family “was indifferent” about them going to college and continuing to graduate school.

Question 6: Were there any unusual encounters you experienced during your transition to graduate school?

Other than a cultural adjustment, most student veterans interviewed stated how surprised they were that many of their professors were always academics and had little work experience (if any) outside the classroom. For example, each professor was compared to the military, where there is a standard one can expect. These student veterans talked about how each professor brought a different perspective on the same subject and how each professor was adamant about their view. That on-campus university culture is different at all levels and, to the military mindset, superfluous.

Several student veterans found that many professors they had were foreign nationals who did not have an excellent command of the English language. Finally, that public policy does affect the quality and timeliness of higher education and can change with each administration.

Analysis

This qualitative phenomenological study explored student veterans’ perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and experiences seeking a graduate or postgraduate degree at a comprehensive mid-

sized regional university. Each student veteran mentioned at least one theme in the following four categories: emotional, mental, physical, and financial health. The participants expressed their perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and experiences freely and comfortably. This free and open dialogue with the researcher is due in part to the principal researcher being a combat veteran at the graduate level.

Summary

This qualitative research study explored student veterans' perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and experiences seeking a graduate or postgraduate degree at a comprehensive mid-sized regional university. This qualitative research considered the perceptions and experiences of student veterans during their transition to academic life and graduate education from a military environment. Experiences and perceptions were unique among each student veteran interviewed. However, core commonalities exist between all the research participants. These core commonalities are pronounced enough to warrant further study.

Themes

Several overarching themes appeared in this research. First, all participants strongly identify as veterans before any other demographic, economic, or social category. SV1, for example, stated he is "proud to enter his classes as a veteran" because he can lend extra knowledge to his peer group. SV3 stated he identified himself to his corporate employer as a veteran and said being a veteran helped him understand the complexities of civilian organizations better.

The second theme uncovered in this research study was the initial fear of walking out of a very structured and disciplined military lifestyle into a more unstructured and less disciplined college lifestyle. For example, SV6 said, "I just did it. Like going to combat, just go for it and

use your experience and training to succeed.” SV7 said he was “terrified” because he was in the military for 13 years and hadn’t been back to class since he graduated from high school. SV7 said he “just jumped right in” because it was the “right thing to do.” SV12 said he “felt time was running out and needed to use his VA benefits before they expired.” Each of these student veterans demonstrates examples of the initial trepidation and fear student veterans can face when deciding on going back to college. Eventually, all student veterans overcame this initial fear and normalized into a college lifestyle.

The third theme uncovered in the research project is that a campus Veteran Service Officer (VSO) is key to each student veteran’s academic, social, and economic well-being while attending graduate school. For example, SV12 said that the Murray State VSO talked to him and helped him get his VA disability rating increased, apply for benefits, including private grants and scholarships, and other critical functions unique to student veterans. SV1 said that he discovered the university’s tuition assistance supplement by talking to the university’s VSO and feels they need to do even more outreach to the active-duty military. SV7 said he uses the university’s VSO as a starting point for all student veteran questions that arise. SV11 said it was the university’s VSO that made him aware of several non-military scholarship opportunities available. Most of the participants in this study use the VSO as a springboard and a plumbline to answer their concerns when they do not know how to successfully apply for VA benefits or need help finding student veteran resources. Thus, VSOs on college campuses own the process of assisting student veterans in navigating the bureaucracy of the federal government and the college to successfully obtain their degrees.

The fourth overarching theme taken from this research study is that VA educational benefits are the primary reason most student veterans go to graduate school. For example, SV1

stated he would not be able to go to graduate school at this time if it were not for the VA educational benefits available to him. SV4 stated, “I will use my VA educational benefits to go all the way to a doctorate degree.” Likewise, SV6 stated she is taking “full advantage” of her VA GI Bill benefits to go as far as she can and get as “many certifications as possible” using her VA educational benefits. SV11 said that he plans to use his Post 9/11 GI Bill to go all the way to a terminal degree. SV11 stated, “I will most likely pursue his EdD degree at Murray State.”

A fifth theme noticed while conducting this research study is that of tremendous bureaucracy and red tape when dealing with the VA and with the college admissions and administration offices. SV1 stated he “almost dropped out of Murray State and went to another school because the Admissions office could not help me re-enroll in a timely and cohesive manner.” SV4 stated he was directed to websites but finally called the comprehensive mid-sized regional university’s Admissions Office and got the info he needed. SV8 summed it up succinctly by saying, “there is too much superfluous B.S. to deal with,” and it distracts from his studies. SV10 stated that the slow-moving bureaucracy of the VA reimbursement system caused her to be in arrears several times with the university’s Bursar’s office, but the university worked with her to ensure she did not get charged extra fees, get disenrolled for non-payment, or be shut out of future classes.

The commonalities of emotional, mental, physical, and financial health are worthy of detailed analysis. The research participants in this study shared stories of unique challenges to student veterans in these common areas. They discussed the radical paradigm shift from a disciplined and mature military lifestyle to a less structured and accountable lifestyle found on college campuses. Not having a set of defined parameters and “mission” was a hard adjustment. They described how they have always kept their identity as veterans first and foremost. The

moniker of a veteran is a lifelong badge of honor for each research participant. The research participants often described their surprise that returning to school created a tense situation for them. Sometimes described as “worse than going to combat.” All student vet participants mentioned that a “primer” or “boot camp” type should be available and mandatory for any student transitioning to graduate school. All 12 participants described the positive emotional support they received from family and friends as a catalyst for success. Many research participants described finances as the most problematic issue in completing graduate school. However, from a non-traditional perspective of having to work, study, and take care of a family simultaneously.

Work/life balance was a common stressor amongst student veterans. The participants described how their experiences with broad-spectrum diversity in life-and-death situations played out as a strength for each student veteran. They could utilize the college campus’s diversity to find answers and insights that non-veteran students could not. The common themes among the research subjects were utilized to directly address and understand the personal experiences of each student veteran preparing and transitioning to graduate-level education.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Discussion

Discussion

There is a great deal of literature on student veterans seeking undergraduate degrees, conversely; there is very little literature available on student veterans going to graduate school. Considering this and because many student veterans are entering graduate programs, there is a need to add to the body of the literature in the area. Additionally, P-20 education as a topic or discipline is relatively new, and there is limited existing literature on this subject as well.

This phenomenological study, therefore, addressed two somewhat limited data sets: P-20 and student veterans simultaneously. To this end, the primary researcher deliberately selected student veterans entering or already in graduate programs at a mid-sized comprehensive regional university. Survey participants eagerly and openly discussed their experiences, lessons learned, and phenomenological occurrences with the primary researcher about their transition from undergraduate studies to graduate school. All participants were comfortable discussing these issues with the primary researchers as he is also a student veteran who has experienced combat and journeyed through a graduate program. This qualitative study revealed and consequently focused on the four core areas of emotional, mental, physical, and financial health. Each of these thematic tones was addressed via the personal experiences lived by each student veteran transitioning to graduate-level education.

Other student veterans desiring or deciding to continue to a graduate program after receiving their baccalaureate degree may find this study helpful and encouraging. At a minimum, take away valuable lessons learned to make their journey in graduate school a little more practical and cohesive.

Conclusion of Research Questions

All 12 participants described their experiences and were very comfortable with the researcher. Since the researcher is a combat veteran, the participants placed great credibility on his approach and motivations. The researcher conducted 11 interviews via teleconferences (ZOOM), surveys, phone calls, and one face-to-face meeting (due primarily to COVID-19 precautions recommended by the government and universities resulting from the said pandemic and the student veteran being unfamiliar with available teleconferencing technology). The face-to-face meeting was recorded for future analysis and reference. Electronic media were used to conduct non-face-to-face interviews, including a desktop computer and an Apple tablet. Student veteran interviews took place during October and November 2022. The researcher asked all the participants the same interview questions regarding their perceptions, motivations, beliefs, opinions, understandings, and experiences. These questions were standardized to protect the confidentiality of respondents; their answers to interview questions were kept confidential and anonymous. This phenomenological study extracted each interviewee's name and all personal identifying data.

The researcher used direct and standardized approaches to interviewing and questioning to collect precise data from student veterans. This data was then used to directly address the grand tour question and its associated research questions for this phenomenological study. The researcher also used 20 sub or additional research questions to steer the student veteran interviews, which led to further questions being formulated, postulated, and satisfied. Collected and analyzed data provided the necessary information to answer the critical grand tour question.

Grand tour question:

How can more student veterans be recruited to graduate and postgraduate programs at mid-sized regional universities?

Research question 1:

What understanding of military to college transition factors do student veterans possess?

Research question 2:

To what extent do financial resources impact student veterans' graduate or postgraduate pursuits?

Research question 3:

What are student veterans' perceptions of educational advocacy programs?

Interview Findings

The researcher developed 20 interview questions to present to each student veteran to derive and ascertain specific answers to the grand tour and research questions. Each question was open-ended, allowing participants to expand, clarify, elaborate, and even correct what they felt was warranted or needed. Leading questions were eliminated, and all questions pertained directly back to the grand tour question.

This phenomenological research study discovered common themes among all research participants. Student veterans identify as veterans before identifying with any other socio-economic or demographic group. Before race, creed, color, gender, special needs, or any other self-identifier, 100% of surveyed participants in this study said, "I am a vet." Being a veteran is a lifelong identifier that all surveyed student veterans said they are proud of and that they display whenever they are given the opportunity to do so. For example, SV1 and SV3 both said they

were “proud to be veterans and that being a veteran helped them understand the complexities of college life” better.

Entering an undisciplined environment from a strict disciplined environment was a culture shock to most student veterans. For example, SV6 and SV7 both stated despite their fear of returning to college classes, they “just did it.” SV12 said he “felt time was running out and needed to use his VA benefits before they expired.” This caused anxiety and fear for SV12. All student veterans surveyed eventually adjusted to this cultural change but at varying speeds. The research participants described what a tense situation they faced returning to school after time spent in the military and in combat. Most student veterans in this phenomenological study suggested a mandatory “primer” or “boot camp” course be given to all veterans before returning to a college campus after military life. For example, SV2 stated he feels there should be a “primer or boot camp class for returning adult learners. Especially student veterans.” Providing a transitional tool focused solely on entering college for a graduate degree should be required for each service member leaving military service whether they choose to go to college or not,” according to SV6.

All 12 student veterans surveyed described the positive emotional support they received from family and friends from the beginning of graduate school to graduation. For example, all but one student veteran, SV7, said their family and friends were very positive and supportive about them going to graduate school. SV7 said his family and friends were “indifferent.”

Most student veterans described finances as the most stressful issue they dealt with while attending graduate school. Even with a guarantee of payment by the VA for their educations, most student veterans said the VA was slow and cumbersome to navigate and often lagged behind the university’s payment timelines creating this stress and financial burden. For example,

SV6 stated the “constant worry of the VA paying the university on time wore her down.” And, being a non-traditional student, having to work, study, and take care of a family” was prevalent among student veterans. Most survey participants suggested the VA institute a small stipend or childcare voucher system for single-parent veterans and the same for veterans taking care of other family members who not able to work. For example, SV8 said he “would like to see a kicker attached to the GI Bill to help with childcare and other family expenses” other than a housing allowance. SV10 stated a technology allowance on top of the GI Bill tuition stipend would be nice. She had to buy calculators and computers before she started classes which she hadn’t budgeted for.

Thus, work/life balance was a common stressor amongst student veterans. The participants described how their experiences with broad-spectrum diversity in life-and-death situations in the military (everyone was the same) played out as a strength for each student veteran. For example, SV2 stated he “could utilize the college campus’s diversity to find answers and insights other non-veteran students could not.” The common themes among the research subjects were utilized to directly address and understand the personal experiences of each student veteran preparing and transitioning to graduate-level education. Finally, the primary researcher noted the theme of veterans helping other veterans succeed in grad school. Several student veterans stated that their professors and instructors did not relate well to them and their unique experiences in life. For example, SV1 stated he has excellent professors, but many “have always been in academia and do not understand the challenges faced by student veterans.”

Summary of Study

This phenomenological research study examined how a comprehensive, mid-sized regional university can attract, retain, and graduate more graduate and postgraduate student

veterans: a grand tour question and three research questions framed this study. Data collected from interviews with student veterans pursuing graduate and postgraduate degrees after receiving a baccalaureate were examined. The experiences noted and documented in this study showed that the motivation for student veterans to pursue graduate and postgraduate degrees is based primarily on the benefits available to them and the desire to better their stations in life. The participants stated their primary motivation for pursuing a graduate degree at a comprehensive mid-sized university was to utilize their VA benefits to become more promotable, marketable, and competitive.

Further, this qualitative research study explored student veterans' perceptions, motivations, beliefs, opinions, understandings, and experiences seeking a graduate or postgraduate degree. This qualitative research considered the experiences and perceptions of student veterans before, during, and after they transitioned to the academic life of graduate education at a comprehensive mid-sized regional university. Transitioning a student veteran's mindset to a college academics mindset begins with erasing their framework of military education and understanding one's new role in the college academic environment (Cass, 2014). This research study was not without its limitations, and further investigation on the topic is highly encouraged and recommended.

Relationship of Conclusions to Other Research

This phenomenological research study critically analyzed the literature by themes and subjects. This phenomenological study offered recommendations and conclusions based partly on a comprehensive literature review to enhance, improve, and facilitate the objective of recruiting more student veterans into graduate programs at a comprehensive mid-sized regional university. To accomplish this goal, the primary researcher surveyed the available literature on

the topic and found it to be sparse. Other research studies relate to the fact that using higher education benefits available to student veterans desiring to obtain a graduate degree is the best guarantee of success.

Discussion and Inferences from Data

The participants for this research study consisted of ten males and two females. The age of said student veterans ranged from 25 to 65. The student veterans that participated in this phenomenological study varied in ethnicity – many of whom were multiple minorities (gender, ethnicity, race, disabled). Each student veteran held a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited university and had been separated from the active-duty military for an average of six years. Two student veterans interviewed for this study were currently on active-duty military orders. Survey and interview data revealed that half of the participants were married, and half were either single or divorced. All the participants served on active duty ranging from three to 26 years. Approximately nine surveyed student veterans served in combat or in a combat zone during wartime.

This phenomenological study revealed that nine of the participants are members of the student Veteran Organization on the campus of this comprehensive mid-sized regional university. Almost all participants are classified as service-disabled veterans (and receiving benefits for being service-disabled), with two being classified as over 50% disabled by the VA. Three student veterans surveyed belong to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, none are members of the American Legion, three never saw combat duty, and two did not use any Veterans benefits to attend graduate school. Finally, two were doctoral candidates or had received their doctorate.

The qualitative research design of this study included the five typical components of qualitative studies (Creswell, 2001):

- The survey designs
- Population and sample
- Instrumentation
- Relating Variables
- Analysis

Each of the five components was discussed in detail in this study. From the data, one can infer that most student veterans that decide to go to graduate school are married or divorced, older, non-traditional, and served in combat or during wartime. Additionally, the four core areas of emotional, mental, physical, and financial health being stable or good are critical to the success of a student veteran. Colleges and universities can make special accommodations based on these four factors to ensure each student veteran has the best chance of succeeding in grad school.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

This phenomenological study began by laying down a historical framework of policies surrounding student veterans' benefits and academic participation and completion that stems from said policies. Specifically, this study revealed how the military and higher education in the United States are symbiotic and how veterans have and continue to play an essential role in helping their fellow veterans succeed in academia (Davis, 2020).

At best, the contemporary political and legislative frameworks intended to serve current-day student veterans and service members at the graduate level are sparse. Existing literature about student veterans from previous eras provides, at best, only partial insights into the current

generation of returning veterans and the institutional implications of their presence (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013).

Specifically, refine existing VA educational policies to reflect the present-day student veteran in a technologically advanced world. Unlike their Post-WWII counterparts, today's student veteran does not have to physically attend classes at a brick-and-mortar institution. Online and distance education is prevalent, and the new generation of student veterans are comfortable, and many prefer this type of learning environment. Additionally, refined VA educational policy needs to incorporate international learning access for veterans desiring to obtain a graduate degree at a foreign academic institution.

Any refined VA educational benefits policy needs to consider small stipends for technology allowances and work-life fees such as childcare. Today's student veteran is often single, has children, is supporting other family members, and is disabled. The participants in this research study stated that juggling the responsibilities of adult life with that of studying is difficult. For example, SV6 stated, "I was getting divorced, working, going to school, and more. I almost didn't make it." Being disabled, having children at home, and being single drive up costs which drives up worry and stress.

All approved and accredited institutions of higher education listed by the VA do not have a resident VSO on campus. Having a campus VSO is not mandatory for any school accepting student veterans using GI Bill or other VA educational benefits. As noted earlier, the chances of success in achieving a graduate degree are better when student veterans have a buffer and transition tool available to assist them while pursuing higher education. As this research has shown, VSOs are a tremendous asset in helping new student veterans acclimate to college life,

file for benefits, provide answers to bureaucratic questions, provide a safe and supportive environment, and allow student veterans a common place to gather and seek assistance.

P-20 Implications

This study detailed the specific P-20 elements of diversity, leadership, innovation, and implementation related to the student veteran. This study is particularly significant because it addresses the core elements of a P-20 program at a comprehensive mid-sized regional university, as well as the unique challenges faced by student veterans as a subset of the P-20 population.

This study explored how a university can go about honoring the moral imperative to educate veterans post-baccalaureate while at the same time bolstering its enrollment numbers in graduate and postgraduate programs. In this context, diversity is one of the four key student learning objectives in a P-20 program. Specific to the purpose of this study, student veterans are often members of multiple diversity subsets. Like their non-student counterparts, Student veterans comprise several different racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, and gender backgrounds (Doe & Langstraat, 2014). This wide array of backgrounds makes diversity a subject unique to this group. This study revealed that student veterans are a very diverse yet cohesive group. Regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, age, or belief, student veterans exhibited an earnest “one team” attitude in all their academic approaches. And identify as a “veteran” over any other diversity category.

The implications for student veterans with graduate or postgraduate degrees are immense. Specifically, the nation’s P-20 system needs educated veterans across the broad spectrum of our society. From veteran policymakers to primary school teachers to community leaders, veterans with graduate or postgraduate degrees bring a local, regional, and global perspective to all they do. Thinking globally and acting locally is not a trite saying to a veteran. Especially the combat

veteran. Many veterans are multi-lingual, see the effects of policy and actions from multiple levels, and affect P-20 education from a critical yet positive change approach. Mostly, veterans understand more than anyone in our society the stakes of producing well-rounded and well-disciplined critical thinkers. This critical thinking assures our way of life and collective security through effective leadership.

Veterans are deft at adaptability and innovation. Military life is a daily challenge to adapt, innovate, and overcome. This mindset - more than ever - is desperately needed in these times of decreased resources, decreased numbers of teachers, and increased workloads in the P-20 system. Student veterans are experienced leaders. This study revealed that every student veteran was given a leadership role and responsibilities from the very early start of their previous career (Kelley et al., 2013). Specifically, a veteran must demonstrate leadership to be promoted and, even more importantly, be entrusted with the lives of their fellow veterans.

Limitations of this study

This study was limited to the state of Kentucky and only one comprehensive mid-sized regional university in the state. The sample size was also a limitation of the study. Perhaps more participants would have provided additional insights. The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges to the researcher regarding access and availability to participants. Access to the dissertation chair and other university personnel was also affected due to the pandemic.

The subjective nature of qualitative research was another limitation of this phenomenological study. While the findings of a qualitative study are transferable, they are not generalizable (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Finally, while the researcher made every attempt to protect against researcher bias, the possibility for bias was present.

Recommendations for Future Research

This researcher recommends the formulation of a new veteran's educational policy that addresses the post-Iraq and post-Afghanistan, realities of modern-day veterans. Doing so could ensure that today's modern-era veteran - who is much different from those veterans before them - receives utility benefits. Veterans should be integral to educational policy formulation to guarantee their use and viability.

The implications of revamping existing policies on educating veterans are immense (Herrman et al., 2009). Future research should focus on providing educational benefits to student veterans who desire to attend college in a virtual or online environment. To this end, future research on student veterans in higher education needs to be accomplished on facilitating severely injured, both physically and mentally, veterans to attend college and be offered the same advantage as a non-injured or non-physically/mentally challenged minority student.

Veterans are a diverse group of multiple-minority students. Future research on student veterans must address the fit and applicability of current educational benefits to current student veterans' needs. The policy and benefits of student veteran education must match. That is, the policy must match the current era of world affairs and the realities of those affairs to the ability of the student veteran to leverage and benefit from them.

Finally, the researcher highly recommends a follow-up study that explores the choice of specific majors by student veterans. Metadata analysis revealed thematic undertones of student veterans choosing a few primary graduate school majors (English, education, and nursing) across the broad spectrum of academic offerings. While not conclusive or verified, the theme is prevalent enough to warrant a follow-on research project to juxtapose with this dissertation.

Refining offerings geared toward specific majors of interest to postgraduate student veterans is an area that needs further research and study.

References

- Ackerman, R. L., & DiRamio, D. C. (2009). *Creating a veteran-friendly campus: strategies for transition and success*. Jossey-Bass.
- Altbach, P. G. (2016). *Global perspectives on higher education*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Altschuler, G., & Blumin, S. (2009). *GI Bill. The new deal for veterans*. Oxford University Press.
- Allen, S. R. (2020). *ADM 830 Signature paper proposal*. Murray State University.
- Arminio, J. L., Grabosky, T. K., & Lang, J. (2015). *Student veterans and service members in higher education*. Routledge.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2014). *How great leaders think: The art of reframing*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bransford, J. D. (2004). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. National Acad. Press.
- Cashman, K. (2008). *Leadership from the inside out: becoming a leader for life*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Cass, D. M. (2014). *The strategic Student veteran: Successfully transitioning from the military to college academics*. Uvize Inc.
- Chandrasekan, R. (2016, December 22). *Lessons we can learn from veterans*. Rajiv Chandrasekaran.
- Cooper, D. E. (2004). *Ethics for professionals in a multicultural world*. Prentice Hall.
- Creswell, J. W. (2001). *Research design qualitative & quantitative approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Crow, M. M., & Dabars, W. B. (2020). *The Fifth Wave: The evolution of American higher education*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Cubbage, M. (2016). *A veteran's guide to higher education: surviving the transition from military service to the academic environment*. Lulu.
- Davis, Gross B. (2009). *Tools for Teaching* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Davis, J. H. (2020). *Combat to college: Applying the military mentality to the classroom: how to succeed as a student veteran*. John H Davis.
- DiRamio, D. (2017). *What's next for student veterans? Moving from transition to academic success*. National Resource Center for the First Year Experience & Students in Transition.
- Doe, S., & Langstraat, L. (2014). *Generation vet: composition, student -veterans, and the post-9/11 university*. Utah State University Press.
- Duckworth, A. (2019). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. Scribner Book Company.
- Franks, T., & Franks, G. T. (2004). *American soldier: By General Tommy Franks*. HarperCollins Publishers Inc.
- Hamrick, F. A., & Rumann, C. B. (2013). *Called to serve-a handbook on student veterans and higher education*. Jossey-Bass.
- Hatala, M. (2020). *APA simplified: Your concise guide to the 7th edition*. Greentop Academic Press.
- Herman, A. (2018, September 10). *America's high-tech STEM crisis*. Forbes.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/arthurherman/2018/09/10/americas-high-tech-stem-crisis/?sh=48d57745f0a2>.
- Herrmann, D. (2009). *Educating veterans in the 21st century*. BookSurge.

- Holian, L., & Adams, Tara (2020, March 17). *Veterans' education benefits: A profile of military students who received federal veteran's education benefits in 2015-16*. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).
- Kelley, B. C., Smith, J. M., & Fox, E. L. (2013). *Preparing your campus for veterans' success: an integrated approach to facilitating the transition and persistence of our military students*. Stylus.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2011). *Credibility: How leaders gain and lose it, why people demand it*. Jossey-Bass.
- Kraft, M. E., & Furlong, S. R. (2021). *Public policy: Politics, analysis, and alternatives*. CQ Press, an imprint of SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Krieger, W. (2018, December 12). *Your crucible moments*. Medium.
<https://medium.com/@willkrieger/your-crucible-moments-35994634a312/>.
- Lynch, M. (2018, February 22). P-16 and P-20 initiatives: Critical for education reform. *Education Week*. https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/education_futures/2014/02/p-16_and_p-20_initiatives_critical_for_education_reform.html.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage Publications.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: an interactive approach*. SAGE.
- Moore, E. (2017). *Grateful nation: Student veterans and the rise of the military-friendly campus*. Duke University Press Books.
- Murray State University. (2020). *Veteran and military student success*.
<https://www.murraystate.edu/military/veterans/index.aspx>.

- National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). Veterans' education benefits: A profile of military students who received federal veterans 'education benefits in 2015–16. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020488REV>.
- National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. (2010, January 08). Veterans Affairs Data. Retrieved March 15, 2021, <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/>.
- Peters, B. G. (2022). *American public policy: promise and performance*. CQ Press.
- Porter, M. V. (2015). Educating a New Generation of Veterans. *Business Officer*.
- Ravid, R. (2020). *Practical statistics for educators*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Research Partners.
- Saldaña Johnny. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE.
- St. John, Daun-Barnett, N., & Moronski-Chapman, K. M. (2018). *Public policy and higher education: Reframing strategies for preparation, access, and college success* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Stone, D. A. (2012). *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making*. W.W. Norton & Co.
- Sunzi, & Minford, J. (2002). *The art of war*. Viking.
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). Families and veterans. <https://www.ed.gov/veterans-and-military-families/information>
- U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. (2020, December 2020). *VA education and training benefits*. <https://www.va.gov/education/>.
- U.S. Veterans by Education 2019. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/250294/us-veterans-by-education/>.
- Vacchi, D., Jones, K., Wert, J., Diamond, A., Fullerton, A., Young, S., Kirchner, M., Minnis, S. E., Phillips, G., & Jones, S. (2020). *Straight talk for veterans: A guide to success in*

college. Straight Talk Press.

Webb, C. (2014, April 6). *Student veteran awareness: Christopher Webb at TEDxUNCAsheville*.

(Vide). YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVAB4vbldJk>.

Wells, W. D., & Tigert, D. J. (1971). Activities, interests and opinions. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 11(4), 27–35.

Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2011). *The understanding by design guide to creating high-quality units*. ASCD.

Wright, K. M., Cabrera, O. A., Bliese, P. D., Adler, A. B., Hoge, C. W., & Castro, C. A. (2009). Stigma and barriers to care in soldiers post-combat. *Psychological Services*, 6(2), 108–116. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012620>.

Young, E. (Ed.). (2021, March 10). *Military friendly schools*. Military Friendly. <https://www.militaryfriendly.com/schools/>.

Appendix A

Letter to Participants

Fellow veteran,

Date: 10 October 2022

My name is Scott R. Allen. I am a retired military member and combat veteran. I am also a doctoral candidate in the EdD program at Murray State University. I am writing to ask you to participate in a research study entitled: A Phenomenological Study on Increasing the Number of student veterans in Graduate and Postgraduate Degree Programs at a Comprehensive Mid-Sized Regional University.

This study aims to determine how to attract, retain, and graduate more Student veterans with advanced degrees. You are being selected to participate in this research because you have a graduate degree or plan to pursue one. We have earned our educational benefits the hard way. We must ensure every eligible veteran receives the opportunity to be educated to the highest levels possible. The best people to help veterans are other veterans - stepping in. I am asking you to step in and help complete this mission.

This research study will be conducted from October 2022 to December 2022. Because of the need to record, archive, and access the interview data, I anticipate conducting most (not all) interviews via Zoom or Facetime. All discussions will last approximately 15-30 minutes max. I will provide you with all survey questions ahead of your interview. You will receive a short set of basic questions you can answer and elaborate upon if you wish. Accepting the interview questions ahead of time will allow you to think about the question and avoid knee-jerk responses. Additionally, you will receive an informed consent to read and sign prior to the interview.

I appreciate your time and will keep your participation in this research study to the point. I am available 24x7 – 365 to answer any comments, questions, or concerns you may have. You can reach me at (270) 293-1552 or at sallen25@murraystate.edu. Thank you for your service and thank you for your participation. Very Respectfully,

Scott R. Allen

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A DIRECT RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE OF STUDY AND NAME OF RESEARCHER

Title of Project: A Phenomenological Study on Increasing the Number of student veterans in Graduate and Postgraduate Degree Programs at a Comprehensive Mid-Sized Regional University

Principal Researcher: Scott R. Allen

BACKGROUND

This research study is being done to explore the best methods to attract, retain, and graduate veterans into graduate and postgraduate degree programs at Comprehensive Mid-Sized Universities. Data will be used to help inform decision-makers and policymakers, as well as the public, on best practices to accomplish this objective. Interviews and surveys will be conducted via Zoom, Facetime, and a limited number of in-person discussions when warranted.

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You are not compelled to answer any questions, may skip questions you do not want to answer, elaborate more on any questions asked, or terminate the interview at any time for any reason without penalty or consequence. There are no known risks to you, the participant. Nor are there any direct benefits to you, the

participant. This research study will assist decision-makers, policymakers, and the public in awareness of student veteran success in obtaining an advanced degree.

COMPENSATION

There is no monetary or financial gain for you, the participant, associated with this research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your confidentiality in this study is guaranteed. The only data that will be reported is general information regarding survey demographics. Specific names of institutions, organizations, or individuals will be identified via demographic monikers. Pseudonyms will be used whenever and wherever necessary to protect your identity further. No identifying information other than this consent form will be kept.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Principal researcher - Scott R. Allen, sallen25@murraystate.edu or his faculty mentor and committee chair, Dr. Randal Wilson, rwilson6@murraystate.edu

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

I have read this informed consent document, and the material contained in it has been explained to me verbally. All my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily participate in this study under the above conditions. I also acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form.

Date

Signature of research participant

____Agree to interview, and recording

____Disagree to interview, and recording

Voluntary consent obtained by:

Date

Signature

Scott R. Allen, Principal Researcher

Printed Name and Title

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Murray State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights, responsibilities, or protections as a research participant, please do not hesitate to contact the MSU IRB Coordinator directly at (270) 809-2916 or msu.irb@murraystate.edu.

Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board

328 Wells Hall
Murray, KY 42071-3318
270-809-2916 • msu.ibr@murraystate.edu

TO: Randal Wilson, Educational Studies Leadership and Counseling

FROM: Jonathan Baskin, IRB Coordinator *JB*

DATE: 10/4/2022

RE: Human Subjects Protocol I.D. – IRB # 23-029

The IRB has completed its review of your student's Level 1 protocol entitled *A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON INCREASING THE NUMBER OF STUDENT VETERANS IN GRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS AT A COMPREHENSIVE MID-SIZED REGIONAL UNIVERSITY*. After review and consideration, the IRB has determined that the research, as described in the protocol form, will be conducted in compliance with Murray State University guidelines for the protection of human participants.

The forms and materials that have been approved for use in this research study are attached to the email containing this letter. These are the forms and materials that must be presented to the subjects. Use of any process or forms other than those approved by the IRB will be considered misconduct in research as stated in the MSU IRB Procedures and Guidelines section 20.3.

Your stated data collection period is from 10/4/2022 to 12/2/2022.

If data collection extends beyond this period, please submit an Amendment to an Approved Protocol form detailing the new data collection period and the reason for the change.

This Level 1 approval is valid until 10/3/2023.

If data collection and analysis extends beyond this date, the research project must be reviewed as a continuation project by the IRB prior to the end of the approval period, 10/3/2023. You must reapply for IRB approval by submitting a Project Update and Closure form (available at murraystate.edu/ibrb). You must allow ample time for IRB processing and decision prior to your expiration date, or your research must stop until such time that IRB approval is received. If the research project is completed by the end of the approval period, then a Project Update and Closure form must be submitted for IRB review so that your protocol may be closed. It is your responsibility to submit the appropriate paperwork in a timely manner.

The protocol is approved. You may begin data collection now.

*Opportunity
afforded*

murraystate.edu

Appendix D

Actual Survey Script

SCRIPT OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

Total Time of participation 15-30 minutes

Transcript of statements to be read to each survey participant by the Principal Investigator:

- I. Participation in this phenomenological survey and its associate interviews is strictly voluntary. You may rescind your volunteering at any point. You do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with or do not agree with, or do not understand.

- II. Your confidentiality is assured. Your name or other personally identifiable information will be stripped and masked for this survey. Only general demographic information will be conglomerated to render conclusions and recommendations for this study. Numerical values and identifiers along with pseudonyms will be used in reporting data findings. Other than this consent form (which will be purged after three years), no personal identifying information will be reported, permanently kept, or disclosed in the conduct of this study

- III. Do you have any questions before you begin the survey?

Graduate School Preparation Questions (5 minutes)

Question 1: Do you feel you were ready to enter graduate school?

Question 2: How did you prepare for graduate school?

Question 3: What influenced your decision to continue to graduate school?

Question 4: How did you pay for your [graduate] degree?

Question 5: What financial programs are you aware of to help student veterans pay

for graduate school?

Question 6: *Which financial resources did you use to obtain your degree?*

Question 7: *What made you want to attend graduate school?*

Question 8: *What other programs do you feel should be available to help Student veterans succeed in graduate school?*

Motivation and Disposition to Attend Graduate School (10 minutes)

Question 1: *Describe your physical health when you decided to attend grad school?*

Question 2: *Describe your mental health when pursuing your graduate degree?*

Question 3: *Describe your financial health when you chose to apply for grad school?*

Question 4: *Describe your emotional health when you decided to enter graduate school?*

Question 5: *What (if any) external factors assisted your decision to pursue a graduate degree?*

Question 6: *What aspects of the transition process from undergraduate to graduate school would you change to make future student veterans' experience a smoother event?*

Transition to Graduate School (10 minutes)

Question 1: *When you decided to go to grad school, what social issues did you experience?*

Question 2: *When you decided to apply for graduate school, what emotional issues did you experience?*

Question 3: *When you decided to apply for graduate school, what physical issues did you experience?*

Question 4: *When you decided to apply for graduate school, what financial issues did you experience?*

Question 5: *How did family and friends react to your decision to go to graduate school?*

Question 6: *Were there any unusual encounters you experienced during your transition to graduate school?*

Some of the questions discussed in this survey entail personal and health-related matters. If you need further private discussion with a professional physical or mental health counselor, Murray State University (MSU) offers several resources. For specific information and assistance about counseling services provided by MSU (confidential and free of charge), please refer to the following website: <https://www.murraystate.edu/about/administration/StudentAffairs/departments/counseling>. You can also email the counseling center at msu.counselingcenter@murraystate.edu. Call the counseling center at (270) 809-6851 to immediately speak with an on-call counselor from 9 am-3 pm Monday through Friday