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FACTORS AFFECTING COLLEGE CHOICE AND TRANSFER: A STUDY OF THE

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF STUDENT VETERANS

by

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ABSTRACT

FACTORS AFFECTING COLLEGE CHOICE AND TRANSFER: A STUDY OF THE
DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF STUDENT VETERANS

Regenia Hill
Old Dominion University, 2016
Director: Dr. Dana Burnett

With the reduction of U.S. involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the number of veterans seeking higher education has increased. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill has made education more affordable and accessible to service members and their families. Veterans have many choices when deciding which institution to attend, including community colleges, four-year public universities, private four-year colleges, and private for-profit institutions. Each institution has something different to offer with regard to programs and services. Since the enactment of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, both community colleges and private for-profit institutions have experienced increased enrollment of student veterans. This study explored and examined factors affecting student veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education and why many of these students later decided to transfer to a two-year public institution or community college.

Interviews explored the lived experiences of student veterans regarding college choice and transfer. As institutions of higher education renew their focus on student veterans, it is paramount to understand the needs of this unique population. The results of this study promise to provide a better understanding of the college experiences of student veterans in pursuit of higher education.

This dissertation is dedicated to the many individuals who were denied an education in the segregated South, to my parents the late George Hill Jr., and my mother Carrie Hill, and to the many individuals who have and are serving in the U.S. military.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I was amazed when I received my acceptance letter welcoming me into the Ph.D. program at ODU; my GRE scores were not the best. I called my oldest sister, Carolyn to share my good news. She immediately detected sadness and anxiety in my voice.   The age-old adage of "be careful what you ask for" definitely applied here. I had prepared myself to receive a rejection letter; instead, I received an acceptance letter. My sister, known for her directness, basically said "they would not have accepted you unless they thought you could do the work!" So, finally here I am, I did the work. Thank you Jesus; it is finished.

First, I thank my brothers and sisters (Gary, Larry, Roger, Carolyn, Jan, and Shelby). Without their support and constant encouragement, I'm not sure I would have persevered. Your words of encouragement and love sustained me in completing this project. I must also thank my brothers-in-law, Henry McCray and Herbert Jones, both served in the military and both provided invaluable personal support.

Dr. Dana Burnett, you gained my trust and respect when you served as the Vice President of Student Affairs. Who knew you would one day end up being my dissertation chair! Thank you for guiding me through this process and for having faith in me. Your patience and sense of humor kept me motivated to the end.

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To my husband, Stan Jones, thank you for your continued encouragement and support. You believed in me when I did not believe in myself. Last but not least, I thank my daughter, Kayla Hill-Jones. As I worked on my dissertation, Kayla sat with me completing her homework. She encouraged me to keep working even when I was mentally and physically tired. I will always cherish the memory of this time with you. I am proud to say, Kayla will start her college career this fall at ODU. Go Monarchs!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the American Council on Education (2008), nearly two million veterans will be returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Of this number, many will consider enrolling or continuing studies in higher education. Ninety percent of military personnel entered the armed forces without bachelor's degrees after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (McBain, 2008). With the expected influx of military students, higher education administrators are evaluating current services and are implementing new policies to meet the needs of this unique population (Persky, 2010; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; Vacchi, 2012).

With changes in policies and implementation of support services, colleges and universities have increased marketing efforts to recruit veterans. The renewed and increased interest in this particular population has fueled the competition to enroll returning service members. For example, the University of Phoenix created a military division with more than 1,000 employees whose sole purpose is to advise and assist military personnel (Sewall, 2010).

Student veterans can choose from a variety of programs and academic institutions, including community colleges, four-year public institutions, private not-for-profit four-year colleges, and private for-profit schools. How do these students make decisions about which type of institution to attend? What is the decision-making process regarding selection of transfer institution? The current literature on veterans and higher education generally focuses on the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, characteristics of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, transitional issues, and student support services. This study explored factors that influenced college choice and the transfer process of student veterans, with the intent of adding to the existing literature.

The context of this study is grounded in understanding the partnership between higher education and the military. Throughout history, legislation has established a partnership between higher education and the military, specifically through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (known as the G.I. Bill). The G.I. Bill provided financial support to veterans, including three key provisions: education and training; loan guaranty for homes, farms, or businesses; and unemployment pay (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). The impact of the G.I. Bill was significant, particularly in higher education (Rumann et al., 2011). Veterans enrolled in colleges and universities in unprecedented numbers (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). In 1947, veterans accounted for 49% of college admissions (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). In 1957, by the end of the G.I. Bill, 7.8 million of 16 million World War II veterans received educational benefits, compliments of the G.I. Bill (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

Today, the partnership between higher education and the military continues with the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (known as the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill). The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill provides extensive educational benefits to veterans seeking financial support to fund higher education. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill is available to veterans who served at least 90 days of active duty after September 10, 2001 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). Depending on the length of active duty service, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill entitles veterans to a percentage of several educational expenses, including the cost of tuition and fees up to the highest tuition charged at the state's public institution, a monthly housing allowance, a yearly book and supply stipend, and a one-time payment of $500 for individuals relocating from highly rural areas (O'Herrin, 2011; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

Rumann and Hamrick (2009) described a number of essential differences in the formation of armed services between the 1940s and 2015. In the 1940s, conscription into military service

by the Selective Service System was the primary means of ensuring and maintaining personnel for the armed services. However, the active draft ended in 1973, thereby establishing the military as an all-volunteer force, which is how it remains today. The impact of the current G.I. Bill is unknown. Societal changes and/or differences during the implementation of the original G.I. Bill compared with the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill may provide some clues as to the possible impact on college enrollment.

The change to volunteer forces brought about a need to recruit potential service members. The U.S. military used educational benefits as an incentive to recruit young men and women into the armed forces. Educational benefits provided an opportunity to individuals who lacked the financial resources to pursue an education. The all-volunteer force, unlike conscripted service, gave individuals a choice of enrolling in post-secondary education immediately after high school, or enrolling in the armed services with the option of pursuing education at a later date (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

In 2009, the first available year of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, both private for-profit and community colleges experienced increased enrollment of veterans who used the new educational benefit (Sewall, 2010). Forty-three percent of military personnel will specifically decide to enroll at a community college (Radford, 2009; Wheeler, 2012). Among the top 15 institutions that enrolled more than 1,000 students using the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, 7 were private for-profit institutions and 5 were community colleges (Sewall, 2010). According to Sewall (2010), from 2009 to 2010, 270,666 veterans took advantage of the G.I. Bill. Convenience, geography, and support systems were cited by veterans as important factors in college choice (Sewall, 2010).

Problem Statement

Private for-profit and community colleges have experienced the highest enrollment of student veterans since the enactment of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (Sewall, 2010). According to Field (2008), community colleges and for-profit institutions are preferred because they are convenient and cater to the needs of veterans. Veterans pursue education at a variety of settings; they seek the best fit with support services that will assist in degree obtainment (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011). This support may directly affect how veterans transition into, and matriculate through, higher education (Ryan et al., 2011).

Limited research exists on how veterans decide which type of institution to attend, and on selection of transfer institution. The purpose of this study was to examine factors that influenced the decision-making process of student veterans regarding college choice and transfer. This particular study is timely due to the enhanced educational benefits provided by the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and the expected increase in veterans pursuing higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this exploratory study are twofold. First, the study explored and examined factors that influenced veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education. Second, the study investigated factors that influenced veterans' decisions to transfer from the private for-profit institution to a public two-year institution or a community college.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study aimed to increase understanding of the lived experiences of student veterans regarding college choice and transfer. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What factors are included in student veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education?

2. What factors are included in student veteran's decisions to transfer to a community college?

Conceptual Framework

Veterans typically experience multiple transitions as they reintegrate into civilian life; one such transition is the entry into higher education. Adjusting to the less-structured environment of college life following military service may prove difficult for some (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Rumann et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2012). Veterans must readjust in personal, social, academic, and vocational domains (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2011). Additionally, the influx of military students on college campuses may present a challenge to student affairs practitioners (Jones, 2013). The decision to enter or reenter higher education and the decision to transfer to another institution is a life event experienced by some student veterans. This study strived to understand the decision-making process of student veterans regarding college choice and transfer.

Schlossberg's transition model served as the conceptual framework for this study (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined transition as "any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). Schlossberg et al. further explained that four factors influence the quality of transitions: situation, self, support, and strategies. The strengths and weaknesses in each area will result in failure or success in negotiating the transition. Additionally, the impact, or the degree to which the transition affects daily life, should be assessed (Schlossberg et al., 1995). For example, the

loss of marriage due to divorce may affect the individual's relationships, routines, as well as his or her assumptions about self, the world, and roles (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

The decision to pursue higher education and the decision to transfer to another institution is an "event" that may result in life changing consequences. Institutional fit and support play critical roles in the decision to transfer to another institution and may impact student success. Applying Schlossberg's theory, student affairs practitioners can help student veterans: a) gain a better sense of control and hopefulness about navigating the transition (situation); b) develop academic motivation by strengthening skills and identity (self); c) identify and maintain support networks (support); and d) develop effective coping skills (strategies) (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Schlossberg's four factors (situation, sense of self, quality of support networks, and strategies) all play a part in successfully navigating the college experience. Schlossberg's theory addresses general life transitions and can serve as a framework for student affairs practitioners by assisting student veterans as they transition and matriculate through higher education.

Significance of the Study

The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill has the potential to change the composition of higher education in the United States. As mentioned earlier, the 1944 G.I. Bill significantly changed the landscape of higher education with the implementation of new policies and services to assist veterans. The 1944 G.I. Bill has been credited with establishing America's middle class (O'Herrin, 2011). The impact of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill is currently unknown. With the impending increase of veterans on college campuses and as institutions of higher education prepare to serve this population, learning more about college choice and transfer is important. This study is significant because it can add to the information about this population during an important phase of life.

The enhanced Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and the return of soldiers from active duty prompted colleges to identify ways to best meet the needs of student veterans. Institutions of higher education across the country have renewed their interest in meeting the educational needs of this particular student population (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). For instance, some colleges have created offices, or have designated a specific contact person, to assist veterans with support services (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; O'Herrin, 2011). In addition, some colleges have received recognition as military-friendly or veteran-friendly schools. These terms mean that individual colleges have made significant efforts to identify and remove barriers that may hinder the academic success of student veterans (Heineman, 2016; Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009).

Because of their training and experience, student veterans bring a different perspective to education, making them a unique population within the larger student population. Research on how student veterans select a college and what influences the decision to transfer is limited. Understanding these phenomena may assist college leaders in implementing programs and policies to assist with recruitment, enrollment management, retention, and graduation rates. These additions can aid student affairs practitioners in meeting the needs of student veterans. Furthermore, the research will add to the existing literature on how student veterans transition into higher education.

Position of the Researcher

My interest in studying this population stems from my professional work with student veterans, as well as my personal connection with family members and friends who have served in the military. In my current position as an academic advisor, I work with adult students, many of whom are veterans. In working with this population, I have found that many student veterans

enroll in institutions of higher education but fail to graduate. I have heard the stories of these students, including struggles with degree completion and difficulties associated with understanding the application process for the G.I. Bill. Research on student veterans tend to focus on the transition from military service to higher education and the support services available on college campuses. Research on college choice and transfer is essentially absent from the current literature.

My goal in studying this population was to learn more about the student veteran transition process, specifically the factors that influence college choice and transfer. The decision-making process of student veterans is an emerging topic; findings could provide valuable insight about this particular population, and how colleges can tailor services to help them succeed. It is my hope that the results from this study will yield valuable information that can be used to influence policy recommendations and enhance services available to student veterans.

Definition of Terms

The following terms was used throughout the study. To ensure clarity of understanding, key terms are defined as follows:

Community college: A regionally accredited institution of higher education offering programs leading to an associate's degree or vocational certificate (Vaughan, 2006).

Post-9/11 G.I. Bill: An educational benefit for individuals who served on active duty on or after September 11, 2001 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012).

Private for-profit colleges and universities (also known as proprietary schools): An institution of higher education that earns a profit for owners (Altback, Gumport, & Johnstone, 2001). Private for-profits colleges and universities offer certificate programs, two- and four-year degrees, and graduate-level degrees.

Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (known as the GI Bill): An educational benefit for individuals who served in World War II (Rumann et al., 2011).

Student veteran: A student who is a current or former member of the military service enrolled at an institution of higher education (Vacchi, 2012).

Delimitations

Delimitations as defined by Roberts (2010) are the boundaries imposed by the researcher to narrow or focus the scope of the study. The aim of this researcher was to understand the decision-making process of student veterans who initially attended a private for-profit institution of higher education and later transferred to a community college. Delimitations for this study included geographical location, participant sample, and institutional type. This study was limited to student veterans who lived in a specific geographical location, further limited to those who initially decided to pursue education at a private for-profit institution and later decided to transfer to a community college.

The results of this study will not include the experiences or perceptions of all student veterans and cannot be generalized to student veterans enrolled in community colleges beyond the regional scope of this study. The experiences of student veterans enrolled at a different educational setting may vary and was not represented in this study.

Additionally, the participant group in this study was limited to student veterans who received financial assistance from the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. Student veterans may receive aid from other sources; however, this study focused on veterans who were eligible for the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, specifically veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Due to the selection criteria associated with this study, the ability to generalize results to other groups or settings was limited.

Limitations

Limitations are potential flaws or weaknesses in the design of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The first limitation noted for this study was the inability to generalize research findings to other settings. Creswell (2009) stated that qualitative research is not meant to be used as a way to generalize findings beyond the scope of the study. Rather, it is a process of gathering information and gaining understanding about a particular group or setting. Additionally, this study focused on a specific population (student veterans) at one site location (community colleges); therefore, findings from this study cannot be generalized to other student veterans enrolled at other institutions of higher education.

The second limitation associated with this study was researcher bias. I have worked at a public institution for several years and have had several family members serve in the military. As a faculty administrator, I provide support services to students, including military students. My work and personal experiences have shaped my ideas about how students are served in higher education and how the government supports veterans. All data was filtered through my personal belief system, which affected data collection and interpretation.

A third limitation of this study was the selection criteria for research participants. Selection criteria for this study included student veterans who received Post-9/11 G.I. benefits and veterans who transferred from a private for-profit institution to a community college. Student veterans who possess other characteristics were not eligible to participate in this study.

The final limitation of this study was participant's orientation to the researcher and how comfortable participants felt with disclosing personal experiences or events. The researcher acknowledged that her employment at a public institution may influence responses from

participants. Because of the researcher's affiliation with higher education, participants may limit their responses.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I included an introduction to the study, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the conceptual framework, the significance of the study, the position of the researcher, a definition of terms, and study delimitations and limitations. Chapter II consisted of a literature review to support and provide a foundation for the research. Chapter III described the research design and methodology used in the study. Chapter IV presented research findings and Chapter V concluded with a summary and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to examine research related to college choice and transfer of student veterans. The researcher explored and examined factors influencing student veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education. Second, the researcher investigated factors that influenced veterans' decisions to transfer from the private for-profit institution to a two-year public institution or community college. For this study, a participant was defined as a student veteran who was a former member of the military, who was enrolled at an institution of higher education, and who received Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits.

With the expected increase of student veterans, institutions of higher education are evaluating support services to determine how to best meet the needs of this unique population. The expected influx of student veterans has, in some cases, caused colleges and universities to increase or enhance marketing efforts to promote higher education. As institutions of higher education renew their focus on student veterans, it is paramount to understand the experiences of this population and how these experiences may affect college choice and transfer.

The literature review includes an overview of educational benefits provided to student veterans, including the 1944 G.I. Bill and the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. The review identified the characteristics of nontraditional students, the growth of this population, and the characteristics of student veterans. A brief history of private for-profit colleges and community colleges is presented, including how the two different institutions serve the student veteran population and the characteristics that distinguish the two. A discussion on marketing higher education follows. Next, the college selection process is described, including three college choice models. The transfer process follows with a discussion of transfer and enrollment patterns of students who

attend multiple institutions. The chapter concludes with a section on veteran-friendly campuses, challenges of student veterans, and limitations found in the literature.

The 1944 and the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill

The original G.I. Bill (Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944) provided large scale funding for veterans to pursue higher education. According to Bound and Turner (2002), veterans accounted for 70% of males attending college after World War II with enrollment increasing by more than 50%. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, the most recent and significant educational benefit available to veterans since the 1944 G.I. Bill became effective August 1, 2009 (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014). In 2012, $8.5 billion in tuition, housing, and other payments were dispensed under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2013). Educational benefits provided by the federal government are critical to the educational attainment of veterans. This researcher explored the features and the impact of the 1944 G.I. Bill and the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the G.I. Bill was established to provide financial assistance to World War II veterans who wished to pursue higher education (Olson, 1973). The provisions of the G.I. Bill included education and training, loan guaranty for homes, farms, or businesses; and unemployment pay (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2013). Educational benefits were available to veterans for at least four years and included a $500 tuition payment per academic year and a monthly stipend of $65 (Bound & Turner, 2002). At the time, the $500 payment was sufficient to pay for tuition at the most expensive colleges in the country, including Harvard University and Williams College (Bound & Turner, 2002).

College enrollment significantly increased, with veterans entering colleges and universities at unprecedented rates (Olson, 1974; Rumann et al., 2011). Total college enrollment

increased by more than 50% from 1.3 million (pre-war era) to over 2 million in 1946 (Bound & Turner, 2002). The G.I. Bill can be credited with establishing America's middle class and is responsible for educating millions of scientists, doctors, engineers, businessmen, and teachers (Alexander & Thelin, 2013; Griffin & Gilbert, 2012; O'Herrin, 2011).

Due to the influx of veterans, colleges and universities developed policies and made programmatic changes to accommodate the increase in the student population. Changes included: increasing class size and hiring additional faculty, offering accelerated programs, extending flexibility in administrative procedures, offering academic credit for military experience, and accommodating family housing needs (Olson, 1974). The impact of the G.I. Bill on college enrollment was significant in laying the groundwork for future legislation to support the educational needs of veterans.

The current educational benefit, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (known as the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill) offers expanded benefits and flexibility to veterans who served since September 11, 2001 (Madaus, Miller, & Vance, 2009). The number of military personnel increased after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, with 90% of service members entering military service without bachelor's degrees (McBain, 2008). Depending on the length of active duty service, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill entitles veterans to a percentage of several educational expenses including: tuition and fees, monthly housing allowance, a yearly book and supply stipend, and a one-time payment of $500 for individuals relocating from highly-rural areas (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009).

Approved benefits under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill include: undergraduate and graduate degrees, vocational and technical training, on-the-job training, entrepreneurship, licensing, flight and correspondence training, and tutorial assistance (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,

2014). Under this benefit, the government provides 36 months of education, which is generally payable for 15 years with an option to transfer benefits to dependents (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). Within the first year of existence, more than half of one million veterans applied for benefits under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, accommodating over 300,000 veterans and dependents (Steel, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010). Lawmakers expect the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill to have a similar influence on education as the 1944 G.I. Bill (O'Herrin, 2011; Reynolds, 2013).

There are several other funding sources available to assist veterans with the costs of higher education, including the Montgomery G.I. Bill, Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance, Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Education Assistance Program, Reserve Educational Assistance Program, and Veterans Retraining Assistance program (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014). Eligibility requirements differ for each program, some of which are designed to protect the financial interests of the National Guard and Reserves.

Characteristics and Growth of Nontraditional Students

Student veterans possess many of the same traits as nontraditional students. A review of the higher education literature suggests that nontraditional students are often over the age of 25, attend part-time, are first generation college students, work full or part-time, have dependents, are single parents, are commuter students, are recipients of a GED, and have little interest in extracurricular activities (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cunningham, 2012; Falk & Blaylock, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2002; Ogren, 2003; Scott & Lewis, 2012).

In the fall of 2011, total college enrollment was 21 million; the enrollment of students who were 25 years old and older was 41%. By 2021, this population is projected to increase by 14% (NCES, 2012). In recent years, the enrollment of students over the age of 25 has exceeded the enrollment of younger aged students (NCES, 2012). By 2021, the number of students

enrolled full-time is projected to increase by 12%; the enrollment of part-time students is expected to increase by 18%, exceeding full-time attendance (NCES, 2012). Researchers expect the number of nontraditional students over the age of 25 to increase. College enrollment of this age group will increase by nearly 20% by 2018 (NCES, 2009).

According to Bean and Metzner (1985), the rise of nontraditional students can be attributed to institutional, curricular, societal, economic, and political changes. Specifically, community colleges experienced tremendous growth after World War II; this contributed to the growth of nontraditional students. In fact, Orgen (2003) suggested that returning veterans from World War II were the first nontraditional students on college campuses. To attract nontraditional students, many colleges expanded curricular offerings to include vocational certifications. Additionally, colleges begin to offer programs at times and places that are convenient to students with families and work responsibilities (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

The 1947 Truman's Commission on Higher Education report and the passage of the G.I. Bill were two political factors viewed by Bean and Metzner (1985) as contributing to the growth of nontraditional students. According to Ross-Gordon (2011), three social and economic factors influenced the growth of adult students on college campuses: 1) an aging and increasingly diverse population, 2) rapid changes in technology, and 3) shifting demands of the workplace. Similarly, Kenner and Weinerman (2011) offered three reasons for the increase in enrollment of nontraditional students; they returned to college for: (a) career advancement, (b) an opportunity to pursue learning for enjoyment or enhancement of intellectual capacity after retirement, and (c) a desire to increase employability after job loss.

Economically, the decline in blue-collar jobs impacted college enrollment (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Workers went back to college to obtain skills for higher paying vocational and

technical jobs. Societal norms begin to change after World War II, with more women enrolling in college programs in pursuit of professional careers (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Currently, the majority of enrollment in the American higher education system is made up of women (NCES, 2012). These factors resulted in increased attendance of individuals from diverse minority racial groups, young people from low social economic backgrounds, and women (Bean & Metzner, 1985). In the 1960s, financial aid and affirmative action continued to diversify college campuses (Ogren, 2003).

Characteristics of Student Veterans

As a student affairs practitioner, it is important to know the characteristics of the student population being served. The needs of student veterans may be unique when compared to other student populations. Student veterans bring the experiences of war with them back home, which may influence other aspects of life, including the transition to college. As the number of student veterans increases on college campuses, it is important to understand experiences or characteristics that may set them apart from the larger student population.

Veterans are typically older and may be considered transfer students because of credits earned while in the military (Cunningham, 2012; O'Herrin, 2011). Additionally, student veterans may be first-generation college students (Cunningham, 2012). Cook and Kim's (2009) research on student veterans featured a profile of veterans enrolled in higher education before the enactment of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. According to the results of the study:

- During the 2007-2008 academic years, slightly more than 3% of all undergraduates were veterans; 1% was active duty and reservists.

- Of the military undergraduates, 75% were veterans, 16% were on active duty, and 9% were reservists.

- In 2007-2008, 85% of military undergraduates were 24 or older, 60% were non-Hispanic white, 73% were male, and 62% had a spouse, a child, or both.

Also of interest is the general demographic information for veterans who are serving, or who have served, in the U.S. armed forces. As reported by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2013), the estimated population of veterans living in the U.S. in 2010 was 23 million; this number is expected to decrease to 15 million by 2040. The population of female veterans is on the rise; projected to increase to 17% by 2040 from 10% in 2010. The projected percentage of minority veterans is also on the increase for Blacks (11% in 2010 to 15% in 2040), Hispanics (6% in 2010 to 10% in 2040), and all other races (4% in 2010 to 5% in 2040).

As reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), the following cities have the highest percentage of veterans: Killeen, TX (28.9%), Clarksville, TN (24%), Jacksonville, NC (22.6%), Fayetteville, NC (22.1%), and Hampton, VA (20.9%). More than one million veterans reside in California, Texas, and Florida. Additionally, veterans are more likely to possess a high school diploma than the average American; however, veterans are less likely to have completed a college degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

History and Characteristics of Private For-Profit Colleges

Proprietary or private for-profit colleges originated in the mid-1600s when Dutch proprietors established private colleges to teach practical skills like bookkeeping, reading, writing, and arithmetic (Davis, Adams, & Hardesty, 2011; Miller, 2013; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). In the 1820s, private career schools begin to grow, particularly schools offering studies in business (Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). During this time period, proprietary schools did not offer degree programs; the focus was on teaching skills for employment (Miller, 2013). The first piece of federal legislation designed to support occupational and career education, the Vocational

Act, was passed in 1917 (Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). This act increased the number of private institutions, particularly business schools.

After World War II, new technological demands and the passage of the G.I. Bill made it possible for veterans to afford education, which increased the number of private for-profit colleges to serve the new population (Chung, 2012; Davis et al., 2011). More than 5,000 private for-profit colleges were established during the first five years after World War II (Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). The passage of the Higher Education Assistance Act (HEA) of 1965 made education accessible to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Miller, 2013). Federal funds became available through the HEA, providing financial assistance to eligible students and institutions (Miller, 2013). In 1972, HEA amendments extended federal aid funding to for-profit institutions, offering individuals an alternative route to higher education beyond public colleges (Chung, 2012; Miller, 2013).

Governance and ownership structure are two distinct characteristics that set for-profit colleges apart from non-profit institutions (Chung, 2012). For-profit schools are governed and operated by individual owners or by shareholders of multibillion-dollar corporations (Chung, 2012; Kinser, 2006). Internal operations are addressed by state corporate law, which fosters the relationship between stakeholders and managers (Simmons, 2013). For-profit schools are private, they are not supported by tax revenue, they are eligible for federal financial aid, and many hold regional accreditation (Kinser, 2006). Chung described for-profit schools as "competitive businesses, that may issue stock, may derive profit, and are taxed" p. 1085. McQuestion and Abelman (2004) described for-profit schools as publicly-traded, multi-campus, and international institutions of education. In 1991, DeVry University, owned by Bell and

Howell, became the first public shareholder for-profit university in the United States (Chung,

2012).

According to Davis et al. (2011), private for-profit colleges fall into three categories:

schools offering certificates with less than two-years of vocational or technical studies; two-year

schools offering associate's degrees and certificates; and schools offering bachelor, master, and

doctoral degrees. Forty percent of the 3,000 for-profit schools are owned by large, publicly

traded companies (Davis et al., 2011; Wilson, 2010). Enrollment at private for-profit schools has

grown faster than any other sector in higher education; the growth rate is 9% per year over the

past 30 years when compared to 1.5% per year for all institutions (Wilson, 2010). The Apollo

Group, which owns the University of Phoenix, is the largest company in the private for-profit

arena (Outcalt & Schirmer, 2003; Wilson, 2010). In 1994, the University of Phoenix enrolled

25,100 students; today enrollment is over 455,600 students (Wilson, 2010).

It is important to know the characteristics of students attending private for-profit

institutions. These students are more likely to be female, single parents, and older than the

traditional college student. In addition, their parents are more likely to be a minority with no

college or limited education, and from a lower social economic status. (Chung, 2012; Davis et

al., 2011, Miller, 2013; Outcalt & Schirmer, 2003; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). According to Farrell

(2003), a significant proportion of students who choose to attend private for-profit colleges are

minorities. Private for-profit schools, not surprisingly, are the top producers of minority

graduates in the United States (Farrell, 2003).

Private for-profit colleges depend on recruitment efforts and marketing for their

livelihood, which requires substantial expenses. In 2011, Education Management Corporation

(EDMC), one of the largest private for-profit education providers, spent $300 million on

marketing, accounting for 22.4% of EDMC's total revenue (Miller, 2013). In the same year, the Apollo Group, owner of the University of Phoenix, spent $665 million on marketing, which was 13.9% of its revenue (Miller, 2013). In addition to spending millions of dollars on marketing, for-profit colleges train admissions staff to be skilled sales and marketing agents (McQuestion & Abelman, 2004). Counselors provide students with a clear and flexible pathway to degree completion, including accelerated programs and on-line courses.

The success of private for-profit schools can be attributed to knowing the market and listening to the needs of students. According to Farrell (2003), the focus on professional training offered at private for-profit schools is attractive to students who are seeking skills to become more marketable. This is particularly true of minority students who may be first-generation college students (Farrell, 2003). Private for-profit colleges operate under a model that responds quickly to match students with careers that are in high demand (Wilson, 2010). Characteristics of private for-profit institutions include the following (Wilson, 2010):

- Most private for-profit schools operate under models that are more flexible than other institutions of higher education. For example, the University of Phoenix offers students the option of enrolling in one or two courses at a time for five to nine weeks.

- Students are provided a course plan that outlines their entire curriculum from start to finish.

- Private for-profit colleges typically do not turn students away if classes are full; the institution adds classes to meet the needs of students.

- Private for-profit colleges offer varying degree options, including certificates, associate and baccalaureate degrees, and graduate-level programs.

- Job placement is an attractive service offered by private for-profit colleges; students perceive this service as a means to gainful employment.

- The admissions process is quicker and easier to navigate than other schools. Prospective students who make an inquiry to private for-profit schools usually receive a call from an admissions counselor within 15 minutes.

- Many programs are conveniently offered online, providing flexibility in course scheduling.

History and Characteristics of Community Colleges

In 1901, Joliet Junior College in Illinois became the first public institution in the United States to be named a junior college (Beach, 2011; Townsend & Twombly, 2001; Vaughan, 2006). Joliet Junior College grew out of the local high school and became a separate educational institution offering college-level courses (Vaughan, 2006). The majority of early junior colleges started as extensions of secondary schools, offering curriculums to meet the needs of the community (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The term junior college was used throughout the 1950s and 1960s to describe lower-division branches of private universities and two-year, church-affiliated colleges (Cohen & Brawer). In the 1970s, the term community college was used to describe comprehensive, state-supported institutions, and was used interchangeably with the term junior college (Cohen & Brawer). The term community college also described the function of the institution; the goal was to meet the educational, cultural, and civic activities within a designated geographic area or community (Beach, 2011; Vaughan, 2006).

Cohen and Brawer (2008) described a community college as a regionally accredited, two-year, comprehensive institution of higher education with the associate in arts or the associate in science as the highest attainable degree. According to Vaughan (2006), "The mission of

community colleges is to provide access to postsecondary educational programs and services that lead to stronger, more vital communities" (p. 3). Similarly, community colleges provide diverse educational programs, including occupational programs, two years toward a baccalaureate degree, as well as developmental and special interest courses (Townsend & Twombly, 2001). Community colleges are committed to serving individuals through an open-access admission policy, and comprehensive educational programs; they serve the educational needs of people in a designated geographic area, and provide opportunities for lifelong learning (Vaughan, 2006).

Access is an important component of the community college mission; it enables individuals from differing backgrounds and aptitudes to pursue higher education (Beach, 2011). One of the main purposes of community colleges according to Altbach, Gumport, and Johnstone (2001), is to provide social and occupational mobility to disadvantaged individuals. Low tuition rates, open-door admissions policies, and location are factors that promote easy access to higher education within the community college system (Bailey & Morest, 2006). Currently, 1,108 community colleges exist in the United States, with at least one located in each state. Additionally, community colleges have educated more than half the nation's undergraduate students (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2016).

Community colleges, like other organizations, have internal processes that guide decision making. These processes are part of the structure of the community college, often referred to as *governance*. Cohen and Brawer (2008) defined governance as the decision-making process used by colleges to address internal and external issues. Schuetz (2008) defined community college governance as the processes used by groups and individuals to implement decisions, set, and control policy, and allocate resources to achieve institutional and state goals. According to Cloud and Kater (2008), governance can take on many forms and can involve several different

constituent groups, including faculty, administrators, trustees, union representatives, and students. Effective governance should facilitate desired outcomes that help manage institutional change and growth.

Individuals who attend community colleges come from diverse backgrounds, possess varying degrees of academic preparation, and have multiple interests and educational goals (Townsend & Twombly, 2001). Zwerling (1992) suggested that today's community college student may possess several attributes; students are often full-time or part-time employees; first-generation college students; of nontraditional age; immigrant; non-native English speakers, from middle, lower, or working-class backgrounds, ethnic and racial minorities, general equivalency diploma graduates, and academically underprepared. Compared with four-year institutions, community colleges enroll a larger number of nontraditional, low income, and minority students (NCES, 2008). The average age of community college students is 28; 57% are female, 43% are male; and 49% are White, 22% are Hispanic, 14% are Black, and 6% are Asian/Pacific Islander (AACC, 2016).

According to Vaughan (2006), community colleges possess the following characteristics:

- Most community colleges are publically-funded institutions supported by tax dollars.

- Community colleges operate under an open-access policy, where all segments of society are served with equal and fair treatment to students.

- Community colleges provide comprehensive educational programs to meet the diverse needs of students. These programs include college transfer, occupational-technical, developmental, and community services programs.

- Community colleges serve students in a particular geographic area, or the college's service region.

Comparison of Private for-Profit Colleges and Community Colleges

The mission and function of for-profit schools differ from community colleges; these differences appear to be disappearing as both sectors begin to serve the same student population (Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). Community colleges and for-profit schools serve adults, part-time and returning students, first-generation college students, and minority students (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Davis et al., 2011; Simmons, 2013). The literature suggests that although for-profit schools and community colleges are different, they share programs that result in increased competition for the same student population (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Simmons, 2013; Wilson, 2010; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). According to Simmons (2013), for-profit schools are in direct competition with nonselective schools like community colleges. This section will compare for-profit schools and community colleges in terms of degree programs, curriculum development, responsiveness and flexibility, marketing, cost, transferability, and student services.

Both community colleges and for-profit schools offer vocational programs designed to prepare students for specific careers. Additionally, both school types offer programs and/or certificates that do not lead to a degree (Lee & Merisotis, 1990). Community colleges usually offer general education courses as part of their transfer degree programs. Initially, general education courses were not part of the curriculum for for-profit schools, but this is no longer the case. In order to attract students who wish to transfer to four-year colleges, for-profit schools changed programming to include general education courses as part of their curriculum (Davis et al., 2011). General education courses are also a requirement specified by accreditation agencies (Outcalt & Schirmer, 2003). Most community colleges only offer two-year programs; for-profit schools offer associates, bachelor, and doctoral degrees.

Curriculum development at community colleges usually involves extensive planning between many levels of faculty and administrators. The approval process of new degree programs at some institutions may take up to several months, if not years (McQuestion & Abelman, 2004; Wilson, 2010). According to Bailey and Morest (2006), school divisions decide on curricula and faculty has the freedom to choose teaching methods and evaluation procedures. Curriculum planning at for-profit schools is streamlined, with faculty teaching from centralized and standardized curriculums. For-profit schools are able to develop curriculum and respond more quickly to employer demands, student needs, and marketplace changes **(**McQuestion & Abelman, 2004; Miller, 2013). The quick response rate of for-profit schools is due to continuous market analysis; this reinforces the perception that for-profit schools offer more choices and are more convenient (McQuestion & Abelman, 2004).

Bailey and Morest (2006) asserted that for-profit schools are more flexible, convenient, and responsive than community colleges. For example, by offering courses at convenient times and locations, for-profit schools have developed a model of education which caters to the needs of working adults. For-profit schools also offer credit-for-life opportunities and a wide variety of course delivery modalities, including classroom, hybrid, online, and accelerated programs; this reduces the time needed for degree completion (McQuestion & Abelman, 2004). Community colleges also offer some of the same features as for-profit schools, such as multiple locations, online courses, and convenient course scheduling (morning, afternoon, evening, and weekend courses).

Compared with community colleges, for-profit schools spend large amounts of money on advertising campaigns and employ intense marketing techniques to recruit students (Miller, 2013; Wilson, 2010). For-profit schools have substantial budgets to support marketing efforts

with television, radio, and print ads (Wilson, 2010). In addition, McQuestion and Abelman (2004) described admissions counselors at for-profit schools as "trained, skilled sales and marketing agents" who treat potential students as customers seeking a service (p. 129). For example, if a potential student makes a telephone or email inquiry, it is likely that the student will hear back within 15 minutes of making the call (Wilson, 2010). In addition to acting as trained marketing personnel, McQuestion and Abelman (2004) described for-profit school professionals as masters of brand marketing.

Branding is the process of developing a clear message and creating awareness of a product in the marketplace (ASHE Report, 2011). Keller (1993) described branding as creating a positive image of a product that consumers find favorable, one that builds customer loyalty. The success of for-profit schools can also be attributed to the way they cater to a specific population or market niche (i.e., first-generation, low-income working adults). Initially, this population was not recognized by public institutions (Tierney, 2011). To compete in a crowded market, community colleges are becoming more active in marketing and implementing strategies for recruitment (Bailey & Morest, 2006). Outreach to high schools and the development of marketing campaigns and publications are strategies that community colleges implement to increase awareness and recruit students.

One of the most noticeable differences between for-profit schools and community colleges is the cost of attendance. For 2013-2014, the average tuition rate at for-profit institutions was $13,712; the average tuition rate at community colleges was $2,882 (NCES, 2014). Tuition accounts for 95% of revenue at for-profit schools (Davis et al., 2001). Compared with students at public schools, students attending for-profit institutions usually receive a disproportionate share of federal aid (Miller, 2013). For-profit school students rely heavily on

federal student loans to assist with the cost of tuition. Even though the cost of tuition is higher at for-profit schools, students frequently chose to attend for-profit schools over public institutions. The choice of private over public education, according to Wilson (2010) may be attributed to the perceived ease of enrollment, availability of courses, and shorter time to degree completion.

Due to the lack of articulation agreements between community colleges and for-profit schools, students experience difficulty in transferring credits. Additionally, courses taken at career schools without accreditation are problematic, as most will not transfer to a community college or four-year school (Davis et al., 2011). The transferability of credit between for-profit schools and other postsecondary institutions varies and is dependent on accrediting agencies, state policies, and institutional standards (Zamani-Gallaher, 2004).

Bailey and Morest (2006) concluded that student services offered by for-profits schools appeared to be more integrated and focused, starting from the point of entry (admission) to graduation (job placement). Student services at for-profit schools, such as enrollment, course selection, credit transfer, and financial aid appeared to be more coordinated and simplified when compared with services offered at the community college (Bailey & Morest, 2006). However, for-profit schools do not offer many of the traditional services offered by community colleges or four-year institutions, such as psychosocial counseling, extracurricular activities, and health centers (Davis et al., 2011). Additionally, Davis et al. claimed that for-profit schools may surpass community colleges when it comes to retention and career placement. The completion rate at for-profit schools offering two-year programs in 2012 was significantly higher (61.7%) when compared with community colleges (36.3%).

Marketing Higher Education

Colleges and universities have developed marketing and advertising units within academia to promote, create, and maintain an image with the end goal of increasing awareness and ultimately increasing enrollment (Anctil, 2008). Decreased state funding and increased competition from for-profit colleges has changed the marketing and advertising landscape of higher education, particularly for traditional public colleges. Through the use of marketing strategies, colleges and universities can better align organizational goals, can be more responsive to stakeholders, and can be flexible in meeting the needs and expectations of the community they serve (Anctil, 2008). The need to develop a distinctive image has become increasingly greater as colleges and universities rethink, retool, and reposition themselves to compete in an ever-changing and diverse marketplace. The expected increase of student veterans has prompted colleges and universities to rethink how to attract this nontraditional population.

The entrance of student veterans in higher education is not new; however, this population is unique because of their military experience, they are considered nontraditional students, and have extensive monetary benefits. Student veterans possess several characteristics that set them apart from traditional students. These characteristics may require institutions of higher education to develop policies and services that cater specifically to their needs. As this population continues to grow, colleges and universities have become increasingly interested in recruiting and retaining student veterans. Similarly, the G.I. Bill has increased educational options for student veterans, enabling them to be more selective in college choice and transfer. For the most part, student veterans will not have to worry about paying for college costs out-of-pocket. Additionally, institutions of higher education are held accountable for admission statistics and retention rates; both are considered measures of institutional effectiveness (Monroe, 2006).

The question for administrators at many colleges and universities is: How does our school gain the competitive edge? What distinguishing characteristics or services will attract veterans to enroll in our college versus the college around the corner? According to Hadfield (2003), customer service is the answer; "except for the quality of our academic offerings, excellence in customer service is the single most important factor in determining the future success or failure of our programs" (p. 19). For years, the for-profit sector has demonstrated how to gain the competitive edge by meeting the needs of nontraditional students. Flexibility in course scheduling and unconventional services, such as onsite childcare, are examples of how for-profit colleges cater to the needs of adult students. For-profit colleges have used marketing strategies that focus on: offering convenience-centered student services, customizing professional training that leads to employment, targeting specific audiences through multimedia outlets, and providing multiple campus options, including bricks and mortar, and online courses (Farrell, 2003).

However, for-profit institutions have come under fire for recruitment practices, most recently because of practices targeting military audiences. Including the federal government, many are questioning whether veterans are receiving accurate information from colleges so they can make informed decisions. According to Murphy (2015), veterans are aggressively recruited by for-profit institutions. From August 2009 to September 2014, the government (via the G.I. Bill) spent $19.5 billion on education, with nearly $8 billion going to for-profit colleges (Murphy, 2015). Sander (2012) stated that marketing is robust in the for-profit college sector with the use of multimedia campaigns, including billboards, television commercials, and online advertisements.

In 2012, President Obama released Executive Order 13607, Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and other Family Member (Executive Order No. 13607). The order was created to provide more oversight, enforcement, and accountability of educational benefits. Specifically, the order provided guidance to higher education institutions receiving federal military benefits for education:

> The Principles should ensure that these educational institutions provide meaningful information to service members, veterans, spouses, and other family members about the financial cost and quality of educational institutions to assist those prospective students in making choices about how to use their Federal educational benefits; prevent abusive and deceptive recruiting practices that target the recipients of Federal military and veterans educational benefits; and ensure that educational institutions provide high-quality academic and student support services to active-duty service members, reservists, members of the National Guard, veterans, and military families. (Executive Order No. 13607, 2012)

Additionally, in 2013, the government enacted Public Law 112-249 requiring the Veterans Administration (VA) to develop policies and programs to educate veterans about college choice and to improve outreach and transparency (United States Government Accountability Office, 2014). This Law has resulted in the VA working collaboratively with colleges, community organizations, and other partners to ensure service members and their families have information to make informed decisions about higher education and education benefits. The following resources are currently in place: education plans for service members, a designated point of contact for academic and financial advising at each school, vocational aptitude and career interest testing, a complaint system to report G.I. Bill and Principles of

Excellence violations, a Choosing a School Guide, and the G.I. Bill Comparison Tool used to compare school cost and graduation rates.

For the foreseeable future, colleges and universities will continue to experience enrollment of service members. Murphy (2015) suggested implementing smarter marketing strategies to attract and retain veterans, "the best thing traditional colleges can do may be to sharpen their recruiting messages and do right by the veterans who do attend" (p. 3). Outreach should make a visible effort to recruit veterans. This means including uniformed individuals in marketing materials, using welcoming language in promotional items, having current military students assist with recruitment, and offering special incentives to family members (Gomez, 2014). The federal government will continue to monitor payout of education benefits and will expect institutions to provide accurate information and services to support service members. It is the responsibility of an institution to accurately represent itself in recruitment and outreach practices, to be honest in services offered, and to use appropriate communication venues (Monroe, 2006). Practicing institutional integrity enhances the college experience of students and promotes a supportive culture. Providing excellent customer service and practicing institutional integrity may be the answer to gaining the competitive edge.

College Choice Process

Several models exist that provide insight into how individuals go about the college choice process. Understanding this process is important to college administrators, particularly individuals who work in admissions. The college choice process is also important in understanding decisions made after matriculation that could interrupt enrollment, such as the decision to transfer to another institution. Prominent models of college choice focus on traditional students; however, understanding the process may offer some insight into college

choice decisions made by student veterans. This section will describe three categories of college choice models: econometric, sociological, and combined. The section will also outline factors influencing the college choice process of nontraditional students. Veterans who separate from the military are often described as nontraditional students who are older than traditional aged students and have work and family responsibilities.

According to Bateman and Spruill (1996) in the college choice process, students evaluate the following criteria: geographic location, economic, and academic factors. Family background, social context, and academic experiences influence the selection process (Jackson, 1982). Kotler and Fox (1985) identified two key factors in their economic model: potential costs and risks. Students and families process and evaluate information to determine the potential advantages and disadvantages of attending a particular institution.   The process may involve calculating the financial rate-of-return of pursuing a college degree.

Sociological models of college choice tend to focus on social status, socioeconomic status, race, opportunity, institutional prestige, opportunity structures, and other social influences in the decision-making process (Southerland, 2006). Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) explained that these models include family condition, interactions with peers, and school environment as the major influences in college choice. According to McNealy (2004), sociological models require individuals to use available resources, cultural capital, and habitus in the college choice process.

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) Three Phase Model of College Choice is an example of a combined model, drawing from both the sociological and economic models. Three stages are used in this model to describe the college choice process: predisposition, search, and choice. Predisposition (stage one) is when students determine whether or not to pursue higher education.

In this stage, individual and environmental factors, along with institutional characteristics, influence the decision to attend college. Search (stage two) is the process of gathering information to narrow down choices. Students identify a "choice set" of preferred institutions. Choice is the final stage. In this stage, students interpret the collected information and make decisions about which college to attend based on the personal and circumstances of both the student and family.

The college choice processes provide important information for college administrators; however, this information may not be particularly relevant to adult students. Existing literature on the college choice process for student veterans is virtually nonexistent; the majority of the literature is focused on traditional-aged students. According to MacAllum, Glover, Queen, and Riggs (2007), traditional-aged, middle-income students conceptualize college choice as a process of informal and formal information gathering. Adults and low income, first generation students tend to choose a college at the same time they decide to enter or return to school (Bers and Smith, 1987; MacAllum et al., 2007).

Traditional-aged students and adult students differ when it comes to the college choice process (Broekemier, 2002). A review of the literature suggests that adult students enter college to get a better paying job, advance in current job, support self after a life event, and gain general knowledge (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006; MacAllum et al., 2007). Levine and Cureton (1998) reported that adult students do not consider the pursuit of a college education as the most important activity in their lives; work and family considerations come first. Additionally, these authors stated that adult students consider the following criteria when selecting a college: convenience, quality, service, and cost.

Richardson and King (1998) suggested that adult students attend college for economic and technological development. Digilio (1998) believed adult students attend college to develop and maintain social networks, meet external expectations, learn to better serve others, advance professionally, escape boredom, and for personal interest. According to Levine and Cureton (1998), adult students identified the following as important factors in college selection: proximity of college to work and home, flexibility in operating hours, ease of navigating college systems, and efficient and friendly staff.

Flexibility in class offerings and availability of professors are factors that Swenson (1998) reported as being important to adult students. Bers and Smith (1987) added that women tend to return to college after a significant life event, or to prepare for a new career; men return in preparation for a job change or to obtain additional training. A study by MacAllum et al. (2007) revealed three factors in adult college choice: convenience, cost, and knowing how easy or difficult it would be to transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution.

As mentioned early, research on veterans and college choice is limited. Existing literature suggest the college choice process for veterans is based on financial influences rather than institutional reputation, selectivity, or proximity (Durdella & Kim, 2012). Veterans tend to combine funding from the G.I. Bill with federal financial aid, which increases the total amount of funding available for their education. Durdella and Kim (2012) asserted that the amount and availability of funding influences college choice.

Ly-Turnbull (2010) found that availability of educational benefits and family emotional support were major factors in college enrollment. McNealy (2004) found that veterans tend to select community colleges over four-year institutions for perceived cost savings. Community colleges are the only type of institution where the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill will cover full tuition costs

(Field, 2008). McNealy also noted the following factors in veterans' choice of community college enrollment: ability to bank or use excess funding from the G.I. Bill, program offerings, and flexible schedule of courses. Additionally, veterans tend to enroll in community colleges that are located in close proximity to military bases (Field, 2008).

Transfer Process

As with college choice, few studies have addressed the transfer patterns of nontraditional students, specifically student veterans (Monroe, 2006). Past research with traditional students can only broadly be applied to nontraditional students. However, understanding the complexity of the transfer process, and how nontraditional students internalize their college experiences, can be valuable information for institutions of higher education (Monroe, 2006). The college experiences of student veterans may provide insight into why transferring to another college is a viable option. For example, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) issued an annual report in 2010, which indicated that first-year student veterans did not engage with their university, and viewed their educational experiences differently than nonveteran students. Additionally, results suggested that first-year combat veterans interacted less with faculty and perceived less college support.

The traditional pathway to degree completion has become complex as enrollment patterns show that students attend multiple institutions (McCormick, 2003; Townsend & Dever, 1999). Research shows that many students attend multiple and different types of institutions before earning a degree (Peter & Cataldi, 2005). According to a study by Hossler et al. (2012), one-third of all students will change institutions during their college career. This percentage was consistent across all types of institutions, except in the private for-profit sector. The transfer rate

for private for-profit colleges was lower (16.3 and 19.6% for two- and four-year colleges,

respectively). Additionally, of those who transfer:

- 37% transfer in their second year

- 22% transfer as late as their fourth or fifth years

- 25% transfer more than once

- 27% transfer across state lines

- 43% transfer into a public two-year college.

A transfer student can be defined as a student who leaves one institution of higher

education and enrolls in another. Traditionally, the transfer process means transferring from a

two- to a four-year institution; however, this description is no longer accurate. As the literature

suggests, the transfer process can take on many forms including: vertical, reverse, lateral, and

swirling patterns. Adelman (2006), McCormick (2003), and Townsend, (2008) define these

processes as follows:

1. Vertical transfer, traditional, or upward, is the transfer from a two-year college to a

   four-year college.

2. Reverse transfer is the transfer from a four-year to a two-year institution.

3. Lateral transfer, or horizontal transfer, is the transfer from one four-year institution to

   another or the transfer from one two-year institution to another.

4. Swirling transfer, or double-dipping, refers to students who attend multiple

   institutions (back and forth enrollment or concurrent attendance between two

   institutions).

According to Townsend (2008), students who transfer consider some of the same factors

in selecting where to transfer as they did in the initial process of college selection. Tuition costs,

how far the campus is from home, and whether friends or relatives are enrolled at the transfer college are factors that may influence where to transfer. One distinctive difference between initial college choice and the transfer process is the transferability of college credit to the new institution. Students must determine whether or not their accumulated college credit will be accepted by the transfer institution; this is an important factor in the decision making process.

Many veterans attend multiple institutions (Dunklin, 2012). Both, community colleges and for-profit schools are popular choices for veterans who seek funding from the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (Field, 2008; Sander, 2012; Sewall, 2010). McCormick (2003) noted that students who attended more than two institutions took longer to graduate. Deployment, multiple relocations, and service-connected disabilities are factors that may prolong or delay degree completion for student veterans (Cate, 2014). From 2002 to 2010, veterans earned degrees at rates comparable to nonveteran students, most attended public institutions, and many took longer to complete their degrees (Cate, 2014).

Students attend multiple institutions for a number of reasons. Students may prefer another school's convenient course offerings and schedules, small class size, reduced college costs for general education courses, and academic program that is not offered at home institution. Students may also perceive courses will be easier at a different institution (Gose, 1995). McCormick (2003) offered several explanations for why students attend multiple institutions. Students may take advantage of trail enrollment (enrolling as part of the transfer decision making process), special program enrollment (enrolling in a unique program), supplemental enrollment (enrolling at another institution to supplement or accelerate time to degree completion), and independent enrollment (completing work unrelated to their program of study).

According to Laanan (2004), prior experiences at a two-year school may predict performance and progression at a senior institution. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) asserted that "where one begins his or her postsecondary education has a statistically significant influence on educational aspirations, persistence, and eventual level of educational attainment." Cate (2014) noted that the location of a veteran's first enrollment impacted the time to degree completion. Cate studied one million student veterans who used the G.I. Bill (from 2002 to 2010); Cate found that students who were initially enrolled at private nonprofit schools had the highest graduation rates at 63.8%. For students who were initially enrolled at public and private for-profit schools, the graduation rate was 21.6%. The impact of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill on graduation rates will become more apparent with time.

Both Laanan (2004) and Townsend (2008) explained that transfer students make several adjustments when entering the new environment of a four-year college. This adjustment may include larger classes and campus size, new location, and increased academic and social demands. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) described this adjustment or transition as culture shock, the relearning of new environments and institutional culture. Student veterans experience similar transitions as they reenter civilian life, and as they enter higher education. As referenced earlier, student veterans may have enrolled in multiple institutions throughout their military career. This enrollment pattern may be due to military relocation or transfer to satisfy an academic need. Other factors influencing transfer may include past and current experiences, personal issues, institutional fit, and academic integration (Monroe, 2006). Regardless of the reason, understanding the needs of student veterans and the transfer process may aid in the development of recruitment and retention policies, and in increasing the graduation rate for this population.

Veteran-Friendly Campuses

The term veteran or military-friendly refers to efforts made by colleges to identify and remove barriers to veterans in pursuit of higher education (Lokken et al., 2009). This effort involves putting people and programs in place to help veterans successfully transition from the military to college. Veteran-friendly campuses are designed to be sensitive and understanding to the needs of student veterans. As mentioned in chapter one, student veterans are a unique population with unique experiences requiring support services that are different from the traditional student population. Veterans returning from military service may be challenged with making the adjustment to civilian life, including transitioning into higher education. They may feel isolated and miss being a part of a cohesive unit (Ackerman, et al., 2009).

The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and influx of veterans on college campuses prompted institutions to review policies and develop strategies to recruit this emerging population. Being designated as a veteran-friendly school is an honor, but it is also a means to increase enrollment of this particular student population. Veterans are a subpopulation of adult students. Many veterans possess transferable credit earned from military education and experiences, some have organizational management and leadership skills, and others have financial benefits available to them as part of their service package (Brown & Gross, 2011). Approximately, 500,000 veterans have received educational funding under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012; Sander, 2012). In 2012, McBain et al. surveyed 690 institutional leaders; 64% reported increased efforts to recruit veterans. As recruitment efforts increase, so should support services.

According to McBain et al. (2012), many colleges have made efforts to improve services and programs offered to student veterans. Most schools reported a desire to continue making their campuses veteran friendly, with an emphasis on increasing the number of services and

programs offered to veterans, increasing marketing and outreach efforts to attract veterans, and providing professional development for staff to assist veterans in making the transition to higher education. ACE (2008) identified several areas of improvement that could assist student veterans in transitioning to the college environment, including training faculty and staff on issues experienced by veterans, raising faculty and staff awareness and sensitivity to challenges faced by military students and their families, and streamlining campus administrative procedures to assist students returning from deployment.

According to Pope (2012) and Heineman (2016), the ranking of military or veteran-friendly, may be misleading and may be used incorrectly by some colleges to recruit veterans. The ranking as a military-friendly college appears in magazines and websites that help connect veterans with programs that may be of interest. However, some schools may lack services that "truly" make them military-friendly (Dunklin, 2012; Pope, 2012; Sander, 2012). More importantly, the military-friendly designation may be one of the criteria used by veterans in the college selection process. Because veterans are a targeted recruitment population for colleges, Military.com provides veterans with a list of characteristics that should be considered when selecting a college. Colleges that meet the listed characteristics receive the designation of military-friendly (Dunklin, 2012).

Every year, *GI Jobs*, a military magazine, publishes a list of 1,500 colleges that meet their criteria of military-friendly colleges (Fazio, 2010; Pope, 2012). The annual circulation for *GI Jobs* is 135,000 homes; the website is another communication tool for the military population (Pope, 2012). In turn, colleges who make the *GI Jobs'* list send out press releases and advertise on their websites that they among the top 15% of colleges in the nation to be awarded the designation of military-friendly (Pope, 2012).

The military-friendly ranking may be a resource for veterans to use in the college selection process but it should not be the sole resource. Pope (2012) stated that "there's no right way to quantify whether a college is military-friendly, a subjective judgment may actually be more appropriate if well-researched" (p. 11). The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill has opened many doors for veterans in the processes of college selection and degree completion; at the same time, it provides opportunities for colleges and universities to implement support services that will assist with the transition and success of student veterans.

College Challenges for Veterans

Reentering civilian life and entering or reentering the college environment can be a challenge for returning veterans (Ackerman et al., 2009; Brown & Gross, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Rumann et al., 2011; Vacchi, 2012). Student veterans may find it difficult to adjust to the less structured college environment after experiencing the daily command and routine of military life (Brown & Gross, 2011; Jones, 2013; Rumann et. al., 2009; Wheeler, 2012). In addition, student veterans may experience isolation or may feel disconnected from nonmilitary students who cannot relate to military experience (Brown & Gross, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Rumann et. al., 2009; Wheeler, 2012). Institutions of higher education are in a unique position to help this emerging student population in successfully completing a degree.

Research provides several suggestions on how to improve the learning or college experience for student veterans. Ackerman et al., (2009) offered five guiding principles about how institutions can help veterans:

- Student-centered activation and deployment policies to help students navigate institutional bureaucracy
- College communication with students during deployment

- Support services specifically designed to meet the needs of veterans

- Implementation of policies and programs that are sensitive to the needs of veterans (veteran-friendly)

- Sharing of best practices, exchange ideas, and conduct research to promote academic achievement of student veterans

Additional suggestions about how colleges can support student veterans include access to a dedicated military admissions representative and/or an individual aware of G.I. Bill processing, campus-wide training for faculty and staff, assistance with transfer of credit and credit for military training and experience, and the creation of student veteran organizations (Jones, 2013; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Rumann, et al., 2011; Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009).

The ultimate goal for any college or university is to retain and graduate students. Unfortunately, there is no consistent way of tracking the completion rates for student veterans who use G.I. Bill benefits (Mikelson & Saunders, 2014). Student veterans are challenged with several factors that may delay or interfere with degree attainment, such as relocation and deployment (Mikelson & Saunders, 2014). Institutions of higher education are challenged with how to best recruit, retain, serve, and graduate students (Marling, 2013). For higher education professionals, tracking the academic progress of student veterans from entry to exit point will help student veterans succeed in meeting their educational goals (Marling, 2013).

Literature Limitations

The current literature on college choice and transfer of student veterans is limited. Research about student veterans from World War II, Vietnam, and the postwar era provides some insight of enrollment trends and institutional policy that can be helpful in serving the current generation of student veterans (Hamriack & Rumann, 2013). Research about

nontraditional students, with student veterans as a subgroup, is also lacking (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Kortesoja, 2009; Monroe, 2006). By contrast, there is a considerable amount of research on the college choice and transfer process for traditional-aged students who enroll in college immediately after high school. Early theories and models based on traditional students can be broadly applied to nontraditional students. However, these theories do not adequately describe the college experiences of nontraditional students and student veterans (Monroe, 2006).

Although nontraditional students and student veterans share similar characteristics, the experience of serving in the military is a distinguishing factor that separates the two (McBain et al., 2012). The differences are greater when student veterans are compared with traditional-aged students. Understanding the socialization of student veterans, military experiences, educational benefits, and demographic background may help to explain the decision process as it relates to college choice and transfer. How student veterans make meaning of their military experience may affect how they transition to higher education, ultimately impacting degree completion (Jones, 2013). More research is needed to improve understanding of student veterans' experiences and their desired educational outcomes, especially as more veterans are expected to enroll in our colleges and universities in the upcoming years.

Conclusion

This research is meant to identify the factors that influence the decision making processes of student veterans regarding college choice and transfer. The participant population included veterans who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and who are receiving Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill became effective August 1, 2009 (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014). The impact of this bill is largely unknown. Research is unavailable about the success and outcomes of the bill. In addition, research that has been completed has used

inconsistent methods of data collection and reporting; these factors contribute to the lack of data (Cate, 2014). Cate reported the following:

> A lack of data on their postsecondary outcomes, and the lack of an established method to collect such data, makes it difficult to accurately measure the return on the G.I. Bill investment. National databases often fail to accurately identify student veterans or track their postsecondary academic outcomes. (Cate, 2014, p. 2)

Veterans pursue education at a variety of settings, seeking the best fit or support services that will assist with degree attainment (Ryan, Carlston, Hughey, & Harris, 2011).   This support may directly affect how veterans transition into, and matriculate through, higher education (Ryan et al., 2011). The research questions for this study are meant to elicit information about college choice and the transfer decisions of student veterans. College choice and transfer are both important decisions; they are life transition events that can help or hinder educational success and degree completion.

The research questions include:

1.   What factors are considered in student veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education?

2.   What factors are considered in student veteran's decisions to transfer to a community college?

The research questions will help provide more information about a unique population, and will help to fill a void in the research literature. Additional research is needed on veterans' institutional choices and factors that influence transfer. The student population on college campuses will continue to change and evolve. Student affairs practitioners must meet the needs of a diverse population by providing the best learning environment possible for all students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine factors affecting student veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education. Additionally, why these students later decided to transfer from the private for-profit institution to a two year public or community college was investigated. A case study research design was employed, using interviews to explore and understand the lived experiences of student veterans as it relates to the phenomenon of college choice and transfer. Research participants for this study included Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who are currently enrolled at a community college and who are receiving educational benefits from the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

This chapter includes the following sections: qualitative methodology, social constructivism, research design and questions, descriptions of participants, site selection, and gatekeepers, research sampling technique, data collection method, interview process, researcher's role, ethical safeguards, data analysis, trustworthiness, and conclusion.

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that employs an in-depth investigation of the how and what, rather than the why, of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Hayes & Singh, 2011). As noted by Rossman and Rallis (2003), the purpose of qualitative research is to learn about a specific aspect of the social world that can be used to generate a new understanding of a phenomenon. Creswell (2013) contended that qualitative study begins with assumptions, where the researcher must use an interpretive or theoretical lens to study individuals in their natural setting.

According to Merriam (1998), "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6). The study purpose, expected uses, and intended users are factors to consider when contemplating design approaches for qualitative research (Patton, 2002). A qualitative research approach was used to investigate the decision making processes of student veterans regarding college choice and transfer.

Social Constructivism

A paradigm, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), is a set of basic beliefs that describe the nature of the "world" and a person's place in it. In social constructivism, individuals come to understand or make meaning of their world through multiple or varied experiences (Creswell, 2013). According to Patton (2002), "constructivists study the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (p. 96). Cotty (1998) believed that truth, or meanings, are constructed through individual engagements with the realities of the world.

Ponterotto (2005) described the interaction between the researcher and participants as a distinguishing characteristic of constructivism. The dialogue and interaction between the researcher and participant is designed to uncover deeper meaning, ultimately leading to a better understanding of the "lived experiences" of participants. Social constructivism was used to frame this study as the researcher seek to understand the decision making processes of student veterans as it relates to college choice and transfer.

Research Design

A qualitative case study research design was selected for this study. Both, Creswell (2013) and Yin (2003) defined a case study as a process of empirical inquiry that uncovers information about a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life setting. Exploratory case studies focus on "what" questions with the goal of developing a pertinent hypotheses for further inquiry (Yin, 2003). Yin suggested that case studies can provide in-depth knowledge of individuals, groups, organizations, and social and political phenomena. Creswell (2007) described the case study as a qualitative approach that explores one or more cases over a period of time using multiple data collection methods. Additionally, Creswell (2013) stated that case studies are bounded by time and place; a bounded system is the context, or parameters, in which the phenomena exist (Creswell, 2007).

Applying Yin's (2003) definition of the case study method, the contemporary phenomenon investigated was the decision making process of student veterans regarding college choice and transfer. Participants for this study included Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who initially enrolled at a private for-profit institution and later transferred to a community college. Private for-profit and community colleges were the institutional types selected for this study; both college types are a bounded system. The phenomenon under study is a contemporary concept.

In conclusion, the case study method is used in social science research to explore a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life setting. According to Yin (2003), researchers should investigate three conditions when considering case studies: (a) the type of research questions posed, (b) control of the researcher over behavioral events, and (c) contemporary as

opposed to historical events. This study's exploratory case study design helped to uncover the answer to "what" questions regarding a contemporary phenomenon.

Research Questions

According to Creswell (2007), "Qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and non-directional; they restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms; they start with a word such as 'what' or 'how' rather than 'why'; and are few in number" (p. 107). Maxwell (2005) stated that research questions should specifically address what you want to understand, and should serve as the foundation for the research design. Maxwell asserted that the research questions will influence and connect all components of the research design.

This study was guided by two research questions:

1. What factors are included in student veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education?

2. What factors are included in student veterans' decisions to transfer from a private for-profit institution to a community college?

Participants

Since the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill became effective, the number of veterans receiving veteran administration (VA) benefits increased by almost two-thirds. Participation in VA benefits is expected to increase as the number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans grows to over 5 million by the year 2020 (United States Government Accountability Office, 2013). With the expected increase of veterans entering higher education, the researcher aimed to understand the decision making process of student veterans in regards to college choice and transfer.

For the purposes of this study, student veterans are defined as individuals who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, who were previously enrolled at a private for-profit institution

and transferred to a community college, and who are receiving benefits under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. O'Herrin (2011) defined veterans as nontraditional students who are typically older. Many may be considered transfer students who have earned college credit while in the military or have earned credit recommendations from the American Council on Education (O'Herrin, 2011). According to Radford (2009), student veterans tend to be older than traditional-aged students, are more likely to be non-white, and are more likely to be female.

Site Selection

The study took place in the eastern region of Virginia. This location was selected for its high concentration of military bases and the large number of military personnel living in the area. This area is home to 11 military installations, comprised of the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Coast Guard (Department of Defense, 2012). According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (2007), Virginia and three other states have the highest proportion of veterans (age 39 or younger) as a percentage of their state population.

Parkview Community College (pseudonym) served as the study site. Parkview is in close proximity to several military installations and is recognized as a military or veteran friendly school. The term military friendly refers to schools that have made marked efforts to address the needs of student veterans as they transition from military life to academia (Heineman, 2016; Lokken et al., 2009). For the 2014-15 academic year enrollment at Parkview Community College was 39,530 students, including 8,922 student veterans (Parkview Community College website, 2016).

Gatekeepers

As described by Rossman and Rallis (2003), gatekeepers are individuals who are members of the setting that are knowledgeable about the organization understudy. Roberts

(2010) defined gatekeepers as individuals in authority who control access to information and to the site itself. Three gatekeepers were identified at the community college, including representatives from the Registrar Office, the Veterans Center, and the Office of Student Development. The gatekeepers received a letter requesting permission to conduct the study (Appendix A).

Sampling Technique

Purposeful sampling was used in this study to select participants. Purposeful sampling is the selection of participants or setting that represents the population; it is a targeted method to choose participants, to focus on the phenomenon, and to help answer the research questions (Creswell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Patton (2002) described the power of purposeful sampling as "information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (p. 230). Rossman and Rallis (2003) described purposeful sampling as the reason for selecting specific participants, events, or processes. Participants for this study included student veterans who attended a private for-profit institution, transferred to a community college, and who are receiving educational benefits from the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

Data Collection Method

In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument in data collection (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Researchers use several methods to collect data, e.g., examining documents, observing behavior, interviewing participants (Creswell, 2009). Similarly, Patton (2002) suggested that qualitative research is a way of investigating what people do, know, think, and feel through observing, interviewing, and analyzing documents. Merriam

(1998) stated that using multiple, data collection methods for case study research can provide a thorough understanding of each case.

According to Patton (2002), "the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experience" (p. 348). Yin (2003) contended that "interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs" (p. 92). To gain a better understanding of the study population and phenomenon, interviews were selected as the primary data collection method for this study.

Hays and Singh (2011) provided several advantages to using interviews as a data collection method. First, an interview allows a participant to use his or her own words to describe experiences. Second, researchers can gain specific insight by asking probing questions, and additional insight from follow-up questions. Third, interviews may be less expensive than other collection methods. Fourth, substantial data can be acquired through this format. Interviews are one of the most widely used data collection methods in qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Merriam, 1998; Nunkoosing, 2005).

Interview Process

The gatekeeper made arrangements for interviews to take place during the week of fall registration. Registration was held in the veterans' center. Prior to fall registration, the gatekeeper emailed a flyer to faculty and staff which included the purpose of the study, availability of the researcher, and participant criteria. As students waited in the registration area, the gatekeeper screened students to determine who met the study criteria. Students interested in participating in the study were informed of the interview location. Interviews took place in a private office within the center.

The same procedure was followed for each participant. Participants completed consent forms (Appendix B) which outlined the purpose of the study, potential risks, and researcher contact information. Participants completed demographic data sheets (Appendix C). The demographic data sheets included questions regarding, race, gender, military affiliation, and program of study. All paperwork was completed prior to the start of interviews.

All participants were interviewed using the same interview protocol (Appendix D). The protocol contained 12 open-ended questions. Students were individually interviewed with most interviews lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were offered the opportunity to review interview transcripts for accuracy. The offer was declined by all participants. As a "thank you" for participating in the study, participants received a $25 gift certificate to a local restaurant. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed. During interviews, the researcher recorded observations and possible revisions to questions. At the end of each interview day, the researcher made note of possible themes and reflections of the data collection process.

Researcher's Role

The researcher can take on many roles while investigating different phenomena. According to Hays and Singh (2011), understanding the meaning of "voice" is one of the major roles of the qualitative researcher. The researcher is responsible for adequately interpreting and presenting the spoken words of participants. Hays and Singh further maintained that, in representing the voice of participants, the researcher should strive for accuracy, completeness, and emotional content. Creswell (2009) and Stake (1995) described the researcher's role as an interpreter, one that involves intensive experience with participants and adds new meaning to the phenomena understudy. My role as researcher for this study was to interpret and present the data

collected, to provide a supportive environment for participants, and to follow the ethical standards established by the American Psychological Association.

Ethical Safeguards

Rossman and Rallis (2003) defined ethics as a researcher's moral principles - "what you consider to be good or bad, right or wrong, defines your ethics and thus, your character, which guides your actions" (p. 71). Hays and Singh (2011) defined ethics as a set of guidelines created within a professional discipline to guide thinking and behavior. For this study, the researcher implemented four safeguards to promote the welfare of research participants.

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the researcher's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The function of the IRB is to review the research study in order to protect the institution from liability, and to protect human subjects from any harm (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2011; Patton, 2002). Guidelines and procedures established by the IRB were followed by the researcher. Second, the researcher developed an informed consent document that was signed by all research participants. The purpose of the consent form was to ensure that all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their rights as research participants.

According to Roberts (2010), confidentiality includes safeguarding the identity of research participants and the information gathered from them. Pseudonyms were created to protect the identity of the research institution and participants. In addition, the researcher was the only person with access to the data which were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis involves preparing and organizing data, reducing data into themes, and representing the data in figures, tables, or through discussion (Creswell, 2013). Data analysis is an ongoing process that happens concurrently with data collection,

reflection, and reporting (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rossman &

Rallis, 2003). Patton (2002) contended that ideas or analytical insights that emerge during

fieldwork and data collection are the beginnings of qualitative analysis.

Patton further emphasized that two primary sources should be used to organize the final

analysis: the research questions and analytical insights recorded during data collection.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), early analysis helps the researcher evaluate existing

data, which may lead to strategies for collecting new or better data.   The researcher recorded

interpretations throughout the study to provide an audit trail and to assist with theme

development. Four analytic techniques: content analysis (reduction of data), constant

comparative method (comparing data), coding (labeling of categories), and theme development.

were used to explain the data and describe the narratives of participants.

Content Analysis

Patton (2002) defined the process of reducing qualitative data as content analysis.

Specifically, content analysis is the process of identifying recurring words or themes in

qualitative documents (Merrian, 1998; Patton, 2002).   Patton (2002) further explained content

analysis as making sense of qualitative data by identifying core consistencies which are often

called patterns or themes.   Transcripts were reviewed several times resulting in the development

of a master list of responses. Similar words or phrases were highlighted to start the coding

process.

 Coding

Constant comparative method of data analysis was used for this study. Creswell (2012)

defined the constant comparative method of data analysis as "the process of taking information

from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories" (p. 86). One source of data is

compared with another to identify similarities and differences. Merrian (1998) described constant comparative analysis as constantly comparing data sources to formulate theory. According to Merrian (1998), categories should reflect the purpose of the research and answer the research questions.

Miles and Huberman (1994) defined codes as tags or labels used to assign meaning to information collected during the study. Merrian described coding as assigning short-hand descriptors to data that will allow for easy data identification and retrieval. Open coding, the process of highlighting key words or phrases was used to identify patterns (Hays & Singh, 2011). Data were labeled and arranged in categories. The process of theme development ensued after coding.

Theme Development

Rossman and Rallis (2003) described theme development as an art, where the researcher goes beyond creating categories, and interprets the data to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Patton (2002) further explained the analysis process, "interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order" (p. 480). Themes were identified adding meaning to the study and to capture the experiences of the research participants.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined trustworthiness as providing quality data that is noteworthy and based on four components: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. These components are similar to concepts found in traditional scientific inquiry. For example, credibility is analogous to internal validity, dependability is analogous to

reliability, transferability is analogous to external validity, and confirmability is analogous to objectivity. Credibility, dependability, reliability, and transferability are criteria to consider when judging trustworthiness in qualitative research.

To assess trustworthiness, researchers may consider four questions:

(1) Truth value: How can one establish confidence in the "truth" of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and in the context of which the inquiry was carried out?

(2) Applicability: How can one determine the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents)?

(3) Consistency: How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?

(4) Neutrality: How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry, and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer?

Member checking and peer debriefing were used to address the first question of "truth value." Creswell (2009) defined member checking as taking data back to participants to determine the accuracy of the findings. Participants were given the opportunity to review interview transcripts. Additionally, participants were asked follow-up questions to clarify or expand upon their responses. Peer debriefing was the second strategy used to establish trustworthiness. Peer debriefing is an external check by an outside peer or expert who can review and provide feedback on the research process (Hays & Singh, 2011; Creswell, 2009). The dissertation chair and committee members were a part of the peer debriefing process. The

researcher met periodically with the dissertation chair to review and discuss the study. Additionally, the researcher obtained feedback from the dissertation committee.

The second question, applicability, was addressed through transferability. Transferability is the extent to which a researcher can apply study findings to other settings and populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Providing thick description of the research process and the findings can assist others in using similar methods and the results in furthering research. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), "thick description present details, emotions, and textures of social relationships" (p. 197). Patton (2002) contended that thick description in qualitative research can improve understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Additionally, Patton stated that thick description allow for individual interpretations regarding the meaning and significance of the phenomenon. For this study, the researcher provided a detailed description of the data collection process, participants, and institutional setting with the goal of supporting transferability.

The third question regarding consistency was addressed by creating audit trails. Yin (2003) suggested that researchers document procedures completely in order to allow others to adequately repeat the study. Various research documents were used throughout this study, consent forms, list of research questions, the interview protocol, and field notes. These documents will allow others to replicate this study and will help ensure trustworthiness.

The final question, neutrality was achieved through member checking and peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined neutrality as an adequate distance maintained between the observer and the observed; the data gathered is considered a genuine reflection of the research participants. Participants were offered the opportunity to review interview transcripts. Additionally, the dissertation chair reviewed and made recommendations throughout the data collection process.

Conclusion

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to describe the research design and methodology used to examine college choice and transfer of student veterans. A case study approach was employed including interviews of ten participants who initially attended a private for-profit institution of higher education and later decided to transfer from the private for-profit institution to a community college. Chapter 4 will describe the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Student veterans, because of their military experience, are considered a unique population on college campuses. Tuition assistance provided by the Department of Veteran affairs, including the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, has made education more affordable and attainable (Olsen, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014). With the drawdown in combat zones, pursuing or continuing education may be an attractive alternative for some. Student veterans have abundant choices when it comes to higher education; they can consider schools that are for-profit, four-year private or public, or two-year community colleges. To gain a better understanding of factors that influence college choice and transfer of student veterans, a qualitative study was conducted using interviews as the primary data collection method. Two research questions guided the study:

1. What factors are included in student veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education?

2. What factors are included in student veterans' decisions to transfer to a community college?

This chapter details the findings of the study. Results include findings about veterans' preferences in college choice and transfer, and which factors influence their decision-making processes.

Description of Participants

Participant criteria for this study included student veterans who: served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, enrolled at a private for-profit institution then transferred to a community college, and received educational benefits under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

Ten students participated in the study, including five females and five males, four

identified as White, five identified as non-White, and one identified as White and non-White. In

addition, the study included participants from three branches of the military (i.e., Navy, Army,

and Marines). Six participants were first generation college students, and three participants

attended multiple institutions of higher education. Table 1 lists the demographic data of study

participants. Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality of participants.

Table 1

Summary of Demographic data

Name	Age range	Gender	Ethnicity /Race	Military affiliation	Academic level	Attended 3 + colleges	First generation college student
Melissa	26-31	F	White	Navy	1st year	3	No
Jacob	20-25	M	Non-White	Army	1st year	No	No
John	Older than 37	M	White	Navy	3rd year	4	Yes
Matthew	32-37	M	White	Marine	1st year	No	No
Lisa	26-31	F	Non-White	Army	1st year	3	Yes
Shelby	26-31	F	Non-White	Navy	2nd year	No	Yes
Mary	Older than 37	F	White	Navy	2nd year	3	Yes
Phillip	Older than 37	M	Non-White	Army	1st year	No	Yes
Kristina	20-25	F	Non-White	Navy	1st year	No	Yes
Mike	Older than 37	M	Non-White	Army	3rd year	No	No

Melissa. Melissa's age ranged from 26-31, she identified as both White and non-White.

She was a mother and was married. Melissa completed six years of service with the Navy. She

attended a for-profit institution for 1½ years, majoring in Art Education. She transferred to the

community college for financial and personal reasons. At the time of the study, it was her first

semester at the community college where she was pursuing a degree in General Studies. She was hoping to transfer to a four-year institution. Melissa appeared very relaxed in the interview and was talkative. She spoke of her husband quite a bit, as he was also a student. She appeared very confident and spoke passionately about academics and her chosen career path.

Jacob. Jacob's age ranged from 20-25. He identified as non-White and was single. He completed six years of service with the Army. He attended the for-profit institution for one semester, where he was studying Criminal Justice. He did not do well academically at the for-profit school, and reported that he had experienced a death in his family. For these reasons, he decided not to re-enroll. His decision to transfer to the community college was based on tuition cost, location, and ease of transfer to a four-year institution. He was pursuing a degree in Electronic Engineering at the community college. Jacob appeared tentative during the interview. He gave very short answers and seemed nervous.

John. John was over the age of 37, was White, and was married with children. He was retired from the Navy with 20 years of service. He was the first one in his family to attend college and ha attended four different institutions. He attended a for-profit institution for five months, pursuing a certificate in training to work on commercial aircraft. He transferred to the community college to pursue the Applied Science degree. He wanted to transfer to a four-year institution to obtain a Bachelor of Science degree in Sports Management. His ultimate goal was to be a coach. John appeared relaxed during the interview; he often laughed about how he wished he had used better judgment in pursuing higher education. He willingly expanded on his answers and appeared to respond introspectively to the interview questions.

Matthew. Matthew was the only participant who was between the ages of 32-37. He identified as White; he was married and had children. He was a retired Marine with five years of service. He attended a for-profit institution for 9 ½ months, pursuing a Culinary Arts degree. He decided half way through the program that Culinary Arts was not for him. Matthew completed one semester previously at the community college and decided to go back. At the time of the study, he was pursuing a certificate in HVAC. At the beginning of the interview, Matthew appeared nervous and a bit hurried. He became comfortable as the interview progressed, and was the only participant who talked in depth about his transition from the military to academia.

Lisa. Lisa's age ranged from 26-31, she identified as non-White, and was a single mother. She left the army after 11 years of service. She was the first in her family to attend college and had attended three different institutions of higher education. She attended a for-profit institution for one year, where she was studying to be a Medical Assistant. As a result of being deployed, she had to discontinue her studies. Upon her return, she transferred to the community college and was pursuing a degree in Business Administration. As a single mother, she stressed the importance of having support and flexibility. She demonstrated knowledge of the transfer process, citing that her program of study was transferrable and that the community college had entered articulation agreements with several schools. Lisa was relaxed throughout the interview and answered questions without hesitation.

Shelby. Shelby's age ranged from 26-31. She identified as non-White and was the single mother of twin daughters. She completed eight years of service in the Navy and was the first in her family to attend college. She attended a for-profit institution for one year, pursuing a bachelor's degree. She was deployed twice while attending the for-profit school. Shelby's boyfriend was a student at the community college; this was one of the reasons she transferred to

the community college. She was enrolled in Paralegal Studies at the community college but hoped to transfer to a four-year college to pursue Criminal Logistics. Attending college was not initially in Shelby's life plans. She reached her tenure in the military and did not reach the next promotional rank. Failure to obtain promotional rank influenced Shelby's decision to enroll in college.

Mary. Mary was older than 37. She identified as White and was a single mother of two teenage children. She served in the Navy for 15 ½ years and was the first person in her family to attend college. She had attended three different institutions. She attended a for-profit college for over a year and was pursuing a degree in Technical Management. Mary transferred to the community college after being placed on probation at the for-profit institution. At the time of the study, she was pursuing an Associate's degree in Social Science and hoped to transfer to a four-year institution. She had always wanted to be a teacher and was planning to teach Special Education. Mary was eager to speak about her academic pursuits, her military experience, being a single parent, and her frustration with finding stable employment.

Phillip. Phillip was older than 37. He identified as non-White. He was married with children and had served in both the Navy and the Army for a total of 18 years. He was the first in his family to attend college. He attended a for-profit school for over one year and studied Business Administration. He transferred to the community college to pursue a certificate in HVAC. At the time of the study, Phillip had been unemployed for one year and was pursuing a certificate to be more competitive in the job market. At the beginning of the interview, Phillip appeared a bit apprehensive, but quickly relaxed as the interview progressed. There was a slight language barrier. Interview questions were repeated to Phillip as well as Phillip's answers. Despite the language barrier, information was obtained that was useful.

Kristina. Kristina's age ranged from 20-25. She identified as non-White. She had served in the Navy for three years and ten months. She was honorably discharged from the Navy. She was the first in her family to attend college. She attended the for-profit institution for seven months and was in the nursing program. Initially, Kristina wanted to be a Registered Nurse. However, she felt it would take too long to complete the degree at the for-profit institution, so she transferred to the community college. She always wanted to be a Psychologist. At the time of this research, she was studying Social Science at the community college and hoped to transfer to a four-year institution. Kristina appeared relaxed in the interview. Her responses were short and to the point

Mike. Mike was older than 37. He identified as non-White and had completed six years in the Army. He attended the for-profit college for four months where he pursued a certification in Computer Programming. He transferred to the community college after moving back home. Mike was attracted to the community college because of the partnerships between the college and local employers. He stated that several companies look to the community college to train employees for their respective workforce. Mike was relaxed in the interview and spoke openly about his academic experiences. Upon starting at the community college, Mike wanted to make sure he found a program where he could capitalize on his military background. He recently graduated with an Associate's degree in Electronics.

Description of Site Selection

Parkview Community College (pseudonym) is the second largest community college in the state, with an annual enrollment nearing 45,000 students. Thirty-four percent of Parkview's student population is affiliated with the military. Parkview is the 11th largest two-year community college in the nation and is the 17th largest associate degree producer in the U.S.

The college's veterans' center was established in 2012. The center is a one-stop resource, which offers extensive services to military students. Services include: counseling, academic advising, degree planning, financial aid, veteran's benefit enrollment, course registration, domicile determination, as well as placement and career readiness testing. To assist active duty students, academic advisors are present on four major military installations, with rotating visits to smaller installations. At the time of the study, 93% of staff at the center consisted of veterans or military spouses. During the 2013-2014 academic year the center served a total of 14,343 military students: 45.5% were veterans, 14.5% were active duty, and 40% were dependents (College website, 2015).

The mission of the center is to provide timely, responsive, effective academic and support services to students associated with the United States military, facilitating their educational success and employability. The center offers an array of programs to evaluate transcripts related to military credit, including Navy and Coast Guard rating experiences, Army and Marine Corps occupational specialties, and service school training. The center also partners with numerous organizations to support the evaluation of military experience and transfer of academic credit. Other services include access to an experienced Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and Vet Center Outreach Coordinator, and membership in a chapter of the Student Veterans of America.

Data Analysis

This study examined the decision making processes of student veterans regarding college choice and transfer. Interviews were the primary data collection method. Demographic forms and institutional documents (i.e., mission statements, annual reports, and program brochures) were also reviewed. Multiple data collection methods were employed to gain a better understanding of the experiences of participants.

Transcripts were reviewed several times, highlighting key phrases and words that could be used to identify categories. Constant comparative analysis, the process of comparing data to identify similarities and differences was used during readings (Patton, 2002). A master list of responses were created for each interview question. Additionally responses were noted on index cards as a way of reducing and organizing data and to record categories. Codes were placed on the back of each index card to attach meaning to the categories. This analysis resulted in a better understanding of the college choice and transfer process experienced by participants. Five themes emerged from the data analysis.

Theme 1: Education as a path to financial security

The majority of participants felt that education would make them more competitive in the job market, thus providing financial security. For example, Phillip, Lisa, and Mike cited the importance of finding a job to support family. Others cited change in career path and personal enrichment as reasons for pursuing a degree. Participants cited the following reasons for pursuing a college degree: to gain financial security, to provide for family, to gain opportunities for advancement, and to access the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits. Upon separation from the military, the majority of participants in this study had struggled with unemployment. Additionally, some expressed concern with how to market skills obtained in the military to the civilian workforce. Completing a degree was viewed as a means to financial security.

Theme 2: Ease of Transition

Many participants explained that their decision to attend a private for-profit institution was based on program offerings and ease of admission. Mary and other participants were concerned about receiving transfer credit for military experience. Transfer of military credit was an important factor in the college selection process for participants. Mike's decision to attend a for-profit college was based on the experience of others. Malcolm described how he researched

the academic path of friends and family. His assessment led him to decide on what type of institution to attend and which courses to take. Similarly, John cited that his program would lead him to a certificate; this was his reason for selecting the for-profit institution and his chosen field of study.

Shelby stated that she took the advice of her mentor. "It takes a lot to gain my trust; I just took his word for what he felt was best for me." Decision factors also included quick time to degree completion and availability of childcare services. How each participant arrived at the decision to attend a particular college differed. Each participant assessed their individual situation and evaluated their needs before coming to a decision to attend college and selection of institutional type.

Theme 3: Convenience

Location and quick time to degree completion emerged as prominent responses from participants. Kristina commented that the admission process was easy and the time to degree completion was less when compared to other colleges. Mary's decision to attend a specific for-profit institution was also based on the amount of time to degree completion. Mary stated that the quarter system was appealing to her; she could enroll in more courses and complete them in less time than at a college that offered a traditional semester system.

Several participants mentioned location as a reason for selecting a particular for-profit institution. Participant responses regarding location included, the college was close to work and home, it was in the area, and the college was conveniently located close to after school activities. Participants mentioned flexibility and ease of transition as factors influencing their chose to attend a particular for-profit institution. One participant simply stated "somebody called and I decided to go with it."

Theme 4: Convenience and Affordability

Participants reported location, opportunity to transfer, and program offerings as factors influencing transfer to the community college. Lisa stated that her ultimate goal was to transfer to a four-year university; the community college offered "transfer programs" that eased the transition to four-year colleges. In addition, participants mentioned the cost of tuition as a deciding factor in transfer. For example, Melissa stated that she ran out of money at the for-profit college. Depletion of funds and the low cost of tuition at the community college influenced her decision to transfer to the community college. As stated by Jacob, "The price and the location aren't bad. They have three campuses, so it's not really a loss there. Plus they have what I need to get to a bigger college." Convenience and affordability emerged as themes for question four.

Theme 5: Support and Reputation

Factors affecting decisions to attend a particular community college included: small class size, availability and flexibility of online courses, multiple locations, articulation agreements with four-year institutions, and positive experiences of family and friends who had attended the same community college. The availability of online courses was especially important to single-parents. Location was mentioned again as a reason for attending the community college.

Additionally, participant responses to this question were very supportive of staff and services offered at the community college. Several participants described the staff as being competent, helpful, and accessible. As stated by one participant, "I come here with the silliest of questions and they are always so nice and they help me and explain things to me until I understand." Responses were not surprising as students receive centralized services through the veterans' center. Support and reputation emerged as themes for question five.

Support Services

Participants were asked to describe services and programs offered at the for-profit and community college. These questions were asked to gain an understanding of what services were available at college campuses for student veterans. It was concluded that very few services existed at the for-profit colleges. Only one, participant was able to describe the services available at his for-profit institution. He stated that the registration process was very streamlined; counselors prepared and registered students for classes. He also stated that, since the cost of tuition was more than what the G.I. Bill covered, additional programs were in place to assist with payment of tuition. Participants appeared to be satisfied with services offered at the community college. Comprehensive services are available at the community college and are located in one central area.

Interview Summary

Five themes surfaced from the data analysis: education as a path to financial security, ease of transition, convenience, convenience and affordability, and support and reputation. Convenience emerged as a common theme in participant responses to most research questions. Consistent themes were found among participant responses. Overall, there were few differences noted in the decision making factors that influenced participant selection to attend a for-profit institution and factors influencing transfer to a community college. According to Townsend (2008), students consider some of the same factors in selecting where to transfer as they did in the initial process of college selection. The factors affecting student decisions were the same for their initial enrollment and their transfer. In addition, the factors were generally consistent across participants. More similarities were found in the responses than differences. Data

saturation or redundancy, the point where no new information or themes could be identified was reached.

Additionally, the researcher inquired about support services offered at the two different institutions. Responses varied with noticeable limitations in services at the for-profit colleges. Limitations may be due to participants being unfamiliar with support services available at the for-profit colleges or perhaps students did not need or seek services during time of enrollment. Students enrolled at the community college were supported by the veterans' center which offered centralized services.

Participants shared more insight when posed with the final interview question, "Do you have anything else you would like to share?" A participant commented on the amount of personal attention he received from staff at the community college. The staff was able to quickly establish trust with the participant. He felt comfortable asking questions and seeking guidance from staff. Another participant initially stated that she saw little difference between the for-profit and community college; however, when she started listing the differences, they appeared to be significant. She noted substantial differences in the two types of colleges, including the size of the institution, the number of programs offered, the cost of tuition, and the personal attention or guidance received. Lastly, one participant stated that she felt the community college would be an easier and slower pace and that the community college was more creditable than the for-profit college.

Participants for this study shared factors that influenced their college choice and transfer. Responses and themes confirmed findings in the literature. The following topics will be discussed in Chapter Five: a discussion of the research findings and questions, the conceptual model, recommendations for practice, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore factors that influenced college choice and transfer of student veterans. Two questions guided this research: what factors influenced student veterans' decision to attend a private for-profit institution and what factors influenced student veterans' decision to transfer to a community college? This chapter includes a discussion of findings reported in Chapter Four, a discussion of the research questions and the conceptual model, recommendations for practice, and suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

The majority of veterans in this study were first generation college students; half were attending the community college for the first time, none had completed a degree at the for-profit institution, and 70% expressed an interest in transferring to a four-year institution. Participants gave several reasons for attending the for-profit institution including: location, program offerings, academic credit given for military experience, daycare services, and quick time to degree completion. Reasons for transferring to the community college included: change in degree plan, good fit, location, job opportunities, financial reasons, and program offerings. Five themes emerged from the study: security, ease of transition, convenience, convenience and affordability, and support and reputation. Based on findings, it was concluded that there is little difference between decision factors to attend a for-profit institution and decision factors to transfer to a community college.

Relation to Conceptual Model

Schlossberg's Transition Theory was employed as the conceptual framework for this study. This theory helped frame how participants conceptualize their experiences as it relates to

college choice and transfer. Schlossberg's theoretical model can provide a foundation for college administrators in the development and implementation of policies to support the transition and needs of student veterans.

Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) defined a transition as an "event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 39). Anderson et al., (2012) described how individuals cope with transitions, using factors like situation, self, support, and strategies. The ability to navigate life events or adapt to transitions can result in failure or success. For participants in this study, unemployment and leaving the military were two life events that influenced the decision to enroll and/or renter college. The majority of participants in this study expressed the need to have a degree in order to be more marketable and to be financially secure.

Convenience was a consistent theme noted throughout the study for both college choice and transfer. Schlossberg's Model (1995) provided a framework for understanding how participants move through the different levels of transition. For example, in making the decision to attend college, participants assessed their current situation. According to Schlossberg (1995), individuals consider the following factors when evaluating situation: trigger, timing, duration, and control.

For most participants, the desire to be more competitive in the job market, separation from the military, and having funds to pay for a college education triggered the action of enrolling in college. Participants made the conscientious decision to attend college, they took control of the situation by applying to college, and felt they had the necessary time to dedicate to education. Participants noted that duration was an important factor in college choice; they indicated they were eager to start college but also welcomed the quickest route to degree

completion. Additionally, the age of participants was another factor influenced by duration. Eighty percent of participants were over the age of 26; some participants voiced frustration over not completing a degree at a younger age.

Discussion of Research Findings

This qualitative study addressed six research questions. The study results and research literature provided a framework for better understanding college choice and transfer of student veterans.

Research Question One:

Why are you pursuing a college degree? Most participants felt education would prepare them to be more employable and competitive in the job market. Of the ten participants, four were unemployed. The findings for this first question were consistent with the research literature. For example, Kenner and Weinerman (2011) cited three reasons for increased enrollment of nontraditional students: (a) career advancement, (b) opportunity to pursue learning for enjoyment, and (c) increase employability after job loss. Overall, participants viewed education as a means to better employment.

Research Questions Two and Three:

Which factors influenced your decision to attend a private for-profit institution? Responses to question two included factors such as: to advance skill level, program offerings, and ease of admission. Participants also mentioned eligibility to transfer credit to a four-year institution as a choice factor. Question three addressed what factors influenced enrollment at a particular private for-private institution. Participants suggested that location and quick time to degree completion were the most popular college choice factors. According to Wilson (2010), the choice of private over public may be attributed to perceived ease of enrollment, availability

of courses, and less time to degree completion. One participant summed up the factors affecting

her choice, "The amount of time that it takes, it was quick, and it was easy to get in, really easy."

As cited in Chapter Two, one of the characteristics of for-profit institutions is that

students are provided a clear and flexible pathway to degree completion including accelerated

programs and on-line courses (McQuestion & Abelman, 2004). For-profit colleges operate

under flexible models offering varying enrollment options including classes that meet for five to

nine weeks (Wilson, 2010). One participant described the degree completion process at the for-

profit institution as being very streamlined. He stated that counselors mapped out a course plan

from start to finish. Another student commented on the benefit of enrolling in eight week classes

and completing two courses in two months. Participants for this study viewed completing more

courses in a shorter period of time as a benefit, which consequently became an important college

choice factor influencing enrollment at for-profit institutions.

The research literature suggest students are attracted to private for-profit institutions

because of the focus on professional training, which many perceive as a way to increase

marketability. According to Farrell (2003), increased marketability is appealing to minority and

first generation college students. The current research validated this idea; most of the

participants in this study were minority first generation college students who focused on

marketability.

Marketing and recruitment are important functions to the livelihood of for-profit

institutions. Wilson (2010) asserted that the admission process at for-profit institutions is quick

and easy to navigate with prospective students receiving a call from admissions within 15

minutes of making an inquiry. One participant confirmed that this practice was part of his

experience, he did not consider any other college choice factors, nor did he do any additional

research before enrolling. According to the research literature, adults and low income, first generation students tend to choose a college at the same time they decide to enter or return to school (Bers & Smith, 1987).

Research Questions Four and Five:

Questions four and five examined why participants transferred to a community college and what factors in particular influenced selection of a specific college, Parkview Community College (pseudonym). Responses to both questions were similar. The factors that influenced participants' transfer to a community college included: program offerings, opportunities to transfer, and location. Factors influencing the specific selection of Parkview Community College as the transfer school included multiple locations, flexibility, transfer opportunities, and creditability.

Levine and Cureton (1998) reported that adult students consider four criteria when selecting a college: convenience, quality, service, and cost.   Levine and Cureton further stated that adult students also view proximity of college to work and home, flexibility in operating hours, timely service, and efficient and friendly staff as important factors in college selection. All factors where mentioned by participants. For example, one participant stated she selected Parkview Community College because of support services available to veterans. The student rated services as exceptional, including access to counselors and competency of staff, availability of online and campus courses, location, and flexibility of course schedule. The student commented that her needs were being met as a student and mother.

The participants in this study consistently cited location as a key reason for transferring to Parkview Community College. The research literature confirmed location as a key decision factor for college choice and transfer. According to Field (2008), veterans tend to enroll in

community colleges located in close proximity to military bases. Parkview Community College is located near several military bases and the geographical area is home to a large number of military personnel. Additionally, Field noted that community colleges are the only type of institution where tuition can be paid in full by the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. McNealy (2004) reported that veterans tend to select community colleges for perceived cost savings and the ability to bank extra funds after payment of tuition and books.

Over half of the participants expressed a desire to transfer to a four-year institution. Participants were familiar with local four-year institutions, articulation agreements between Parkview Community College and area four-year colleges, and transferrable degree programs offered at the community college. Participants believed attending Parkview Community College would increase opportunities to transfer to a four-year institution. According to a study conducted by the Department of Veteran Affairs (2015), between 2002 and 2013, associate degrees were the most popular degree programs pursued by veterans with Liberal Arts and Sciences being the most common area of study. The pursuit of this particular degree program may be an indicator of intent to continue education beyond the associate level. According to MacAllum, Glover, Queen, and Riggs (2007), one of the college choice factors for adult students is how easy or difficult the transfer process is from a two-year to a four-year institution.

Research Question Six:

Participants were asked to describe the support services available at both the for-profit and at the community college. According to the literature, institutions of higher education continually evaluate existing services and work to implement new policies and services to meet the needs of student veterans (Persky, 2010; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez., 2011; Vacchi, 2012). For some colleges, the recognition of "military or veteran friendly" may be the driving

force behind implementation or improvement of services for veterans. "Military friendly," describes colleges and universities who have identified and removed barriers for veterans in pursuit of higher education (Heineman, 2016); Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley & Strong, 2009;).

According to McBain, Kim, and Snead (2012), many colleges have made efforts to improve services and programs offered to student veterans. Most schools reported a desire to continue making their campuses veteran friendly with emphasis placed on increasing the number of services and programs offered to veterans, increasing marketing and outreach efforts to attract veterans, and providing professional development for staff to assist veterans in making the transition to higher education. Because of their military experience, student veterans are considered a unique population with unique needs. The support available on college campuses may directly affect how veterans transition into and matriculate through higher education (Ryan et al., 2011).

This study found that veterans, particularly at the for-profit schools appeared to be unfamiliar with services and/or did not have a need to use services at the time of enrollment. Participants were knowledgeable and satisfied with the services offered at the community college; the community college offered comprehensive services through a veterans' center. The type of support service and the availability of support services did not appear to play a factor in college choice or transfer. In most cases, at the for-profit schools, participants did not differentiate between services offered to all students and services offered to veterans. One participant mentioned childcare services as a factor for her choice in attending the for-profit institution; however, this service was offered to all students.

Recommendations for Practice

Student veterans because of their training and experience bring a different perspective to education: this makes them a unique population within the larger student population. There is little research about how student veterans select a college and what influences their decision to transfer. Understanding the experiences of this unique group may assist college leaders in implementing programs and policies that will assist with recruitment, enrollment management, retention, and graduation rates. Based on research findings, five recommendations are presented for practice.

Recommendation 1: Equip college counselors with the tools needed to assist veterans as they transition from the military into the civilian workforce.

The majority of participants in this study have experienced unemployment after separating from the military. According to the Department of Veteran Affairs (2015), within 15 months of separation, about half of service members experience a period of unemployment. One out of two (53%) of Post-9/11 veterans experience a period of unemployment. In addition, a survey conducted by Prudential (2012) reported that "finding a job" is the greatest challenge of veterans in transitioning from the military to the civilian environment (p. 4).

It is essential for college counselors to be knowledgeable about barriers that may hinder or delay employment for veterans. A number of employment barriers exist including: service connected disabilities, dishonorable discharge, job readiness, and transition difficulties. The Department of Veterans Affairs offers an array of employment services to prepare veterans to enter the civilian job market. Services include job training accommodations, resume development, job seeking and business start-up coaching, job placement, and assistance with VA benefit paperwork (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015).

The veterans polled in the Prudential (2012) survey reported several roadblocks to employment including: difficulty translating military experience into marketable civilian skills, competition among civilian candidates who have been in the workforce longer, lack of education, and perceptions that employers may have concerns about disabilities. Additionally, it is important for counselors to be familiar with military career advancement and how skills gained in the military can be applied to the job market.

Two-thirds of veterans surveyed in the Prudential (2012) study reported difficulty in transitioning to civilian life, specifically with regard to figuring out next steps. This is another area were counselors can provide guidance, assisting veterans with career exploration to match interest and skill level. Career counselors have tools that can be used to assess career interest and aptitude. Counselors should also gain familiarity and collaborate with local, state, and national organizations whose mission is to employ veterans.

Recommendation 2: Educate veterans on the different educational institutions available to them including: private for-profit, private non-profit, community colleges, and four-year institutions.

Although all participants in this study attended a for-profit college and a public institution, there appeared to be a lack of knowledge about the differences between the two institutions. During interviews, participants used both college types interchangeably, suggesting some confusion in understanding institutional types and the higher education college structure. Since most participants were first generation college students this observation was not surprising. First generation college students come from families where parents have no experience with higher education (Engle, 2007). This lack of knowledge or experience may present students with additional challenges in learning how to navigate the many cultures of higher education.

For service members, the first introduction to higher education may come from educational counselors who are employed by the military and have offices located on military bases. Educational counselors are responsible for providing service members with lifelong learning opportunities and facilitating interaction with college representatives. These resources are readily available but may not be clearly understood or utilized by first generation college students. Educational counselors and other VA representatives are in a unique position to advise service members on the wide variety of institutional types, degree programs, college culture, and the higher education structure. Educators who share this valuable knowledge with service members can empower them to make informed decisions regarding education.

Recommendation 3: Ensure higher education administrators understand factors that may delay or interfere with degree completion such as attendance at multiple institutions and external obligations.

According to Monroe (2006), very few studies address the transfer patterns of nontraditional students. The traditional pathway to degree completion has become more complex with students attending multiple and different types of institutions (Peter, Cataldi & Carroll, 2005). Many military learners attend multiple institutions due to service relocations and deployment (Dunklin, 2012). This pattern of enrollment may result in stop-outs or delayed degree completion. Four out of ten participants in this study attended at least three different institutions. McCormick (2003) noted that students who attended more than two institutions took longer to graduate. According to a study completed by Cate (2014), on average it took student veterans 5.1 years to complete an associate degree and 6.3 years to complete a bachelor's degree. According the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), veterans are more likely to possess a high school diploma; however, veterans are less likely to have completed a college degree. Higher education

administrators can support individuals who have attended multiple institutions by reviewing all course work and military experience for possible credit. They can also enter articulation agreements with other institutions of higher education.

In addition, nontraditional students may have external commitments that compete with time that could otherwise be spent on academic studies. Adult students do not consider the pursuit of a college education the most important activity in their lives; work and family considerations come first (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of student attrition is geared towards transfer students and emphasizes how external commitments may interfere with degree completion. External commitments are uncontrollable factors that pull students away from academics. These variables are directly related to dropout decisions that interfere with academic progression.

Participants in this study consistently mentioned difficulty managing or balancing external commitments with the demands of school. Finding adequate childcare, unemployment, being a single parent, and inflexible work schedules were all mentioned by participants as factors that interfered with degree completion. Higher education leaders should make an effort to understand what factors contribute to attendance at multiple institutions, what factors influence college choice, and what factors could interfere with degree completion. Understanding these variables will enable institutions to develop policies that will assist with retention and degree attainment.

Recommendation 4: Use multiple venues to communicate available services to student veterans including the development of an orientation program.

The majority of participants in this study were unaware of support services available at many of the for-profit institutions. Although not the only reason, lack of communication on the

part of the institution may be a contributing factor. As institutions recruit veterans they should also make an effort to have dedicated services to support this population. How these services are communicated is just as important. Several venues can be used to communicate services including: dedicated websites, newsletters, and email notifications. To effectively communicate services, institutions must find ways to identify incoming student veterans. Many institutions include questions on the admission application, asking applicants to self-identify as military (O'Herrin, 2011). This reporting mechanism enables institutions to identify, track and contact student veterans.

Creating an orientation program that is geared toward addressing the needs of student veterans can ease the transition from military to academia. Orientation is an opportunity for institutions to be proactive in providing information to student veterans entering higher education. Additionally, institutions should consider including student veterans in the planning of orientation and in the presentation of information. Research shows that veterans may feel more comfortable seeking advice from other veterans with similar experiences (Livingston, 2011; Rumann et al., 2011). Being aware of resources and knowing where to find assistance may factor into persistence and retention, ultimately leading to degree completion.

Recommendation 5: Institute programs and policies that will assist with recruitment, enrollment management, and retention of student veterans.

How can institutions of higher education enroll and retain student veterans? Serving in the military is an experience vastly different from the experience of nonveteran students. Because of this experience, the needs of student veterans are different from those of traditional students. Several institutions of higher education have demonstrated and communicated their desire to meet the needs of veterans through offering customized services such as: dedicated

counselors and space, training of faculty and staff, veteran student organizations, vocational rehabilitation and career counseling, online learning, and review of military experience for college credit. Customized programs and services are becoming a part of institutional planning as a way of attracting and retaining nontraditional students (Monroe, 2006).

According to DeAngelo (2013), students tend to drop out of higher education near the end of their first year. The first year is a critical time for student veterans as they transition from the military to academia. Student veterans are considered an at-risk population because they may need academic intervention and attention to their personal well-being (Falkey, 2014; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Rumann et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2012). In this study, only one student had completed a degree with six participants completing at least one year of studies at the for-profit school before transferring. When considering policy implementation, institutions have the option of examining barriers that may hinder enrollment and progression. Barriers can be: (a) Informational - How do veterans obtain information regarding educational options, transfer policies, and financial aid? (b) Financial - How do veterans learn how to navigate use of educational benefits such as the G.I. Bill and other financial resources? (c) Institutional barriers - How can institutions provide services that will help veterans transition from the military to academia? (d) Physical and brain trauma-related injuries - What services are needed for disabled veterans (McBain, 2008)? As this population continues to grow, institutions should continue to evaluate and implement programs that will attract, retain, and graduate veterans.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study aspired to understand the decision making processes of student veterans regarding college choice and transfer. The research focused on student veterans who received Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits and who initially attended a private for-profit institution and transferred to a community college. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill was a huge expansion in educational benefits, doubling the average maximum benefit level (Barr, 2015). With the increase in educational benefits and drawdown in military forces, colleges and universities are expected to see continuous enrollment of military personnel. It is important that college and university administrators continue to study this emerging population in order to understand how veterans decide on what type of institution to attend, whether it is a first time enrollment or a transfer.

The research findings in this study support the current literature; however, more research is needed. The ultimate goal of higher education is to provide the best learning environment possible to assist students in meeting their academic goals. As institutions develop policies that may affect retention and degree completion, understanding college choice and transfer of student veterans is an important topic worthy of additional research.

First, future research should include the many different institutional types available to student veterans. For example, what college choice factors are considered when selecting a historically black college or university and what factors are considered when selecting a private four-year institution? Examining different institutional types will add insight into the college choice process of student veterans.

Second, future research should examine multiple factors that may influence college choice including socioeconomic status, family background, social and cultural factors, academic ability, and military command influences. Understanding college choice of veterans' means

exploring the process in the context of nontraditional students, plus examining the impact of military experience and educational benefits. The existing literature on college choice focuses mainly on traditional students and is virtually nonexistent for nontraditional students including student veterans.

Third, a longitudinal study examining the effectiveness of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill is needed. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill was enacted in 2009 with iterations since its inception. As more service members use this educational benefit, it is important to have historical data to evaluate the societal and economic impact of educational attainment and success of student veterans.

Lastly, future research should continue to study best practices in support of student veterans. Understanding the characteristics and experiences of student veterans is important in evaluating and developing policies and programs that will aid in their success. Regardless of institutional type, sharing of best practices among institutions is essential in providing seamless processes that foster student success.

Conclusion

This research investigated the college choice and transfer decisions of student veterans. The research was guided by the following questions, what factors are included in student veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education and what factors are included in student veterans' decision to transfer to a community college. Five themes were identified (security, ease of transition, convenience, convenience and affordability, and support and reputation) that summarized the factors in the decision making process regarding college choice and transfer. Knowing these factors and understanding the implications can be helpful for higher education administrators and student veterans.

Several questions can guide higher education leaders as they consider the needs of student veterans. What distinguishing services can my institution offer that will attract student veterans? How is my institution ensuring student veterans are made aware of programs and policies that support their needs? Does my institution have articulation agreements with other institutions to evaluate transfer credit? Is my institution prepared to evaluate military experience for college credit? Does my institution have trained staff in place to assist student veterans? Is my campus welcoming to student veterans? Are services located in one central location? The questions are endless but necessary in evaluating preparedness or improvement of services for this emerging student population.

Regardless of institutional type, colleges and universities should make an effort to understand college choice and transfer decisions of student veterans. With the expected enrollment increase of veterans in higher education, understanding how student veterans make meaning of their college experiences can lead to policy development or improvement that support important college functions such as recruitment, enrollment management, and retention. This study serves as a basis for future inquiry as we continue to provide the best possible learning environment for all students.

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APPENDIX A

Old Dominion University Permission Request Letter

Letter Requesting Permission to Conduct Study at Community College

Dear _____,

  I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Darden College of Education at Old Dominion University. I am in the process of completing my dissertation on the decision-making process of student veterans regarding college selection and transfer. It is my intent to provide data that will improve recruitment and retention efforts, student support services, and assist student veterans in their college selection and transfer decisions. The proposal has been approved by the Institutional Research Board at Old Dominion University.

  In this qualitative study, I will explore and examine factors affecting student veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education and why these students later decide to transfer from a private for-profit institution to a community college. I will collect data through interviews, observations, and field notes.

  I am writing to request permission to conduct this study at your community college. If approved, I will need your assistance in identifying students who transferred to your college from a private for-profit institution. I will also need assistance with scheduling space to conduct interviews. Once identified, these students will receive a letter via email describing the research project. The letter will detail the specifics of the study, including the purpose of the study, my role as the researcher, expectations of the student as a volunteer, the timeframe for data collection, and the data collection method to be used. The letter will include a confidentiality statement ensuring the privacy of participants and that their participation, or lack of, will not affect their grades or academic progress.

Interviews will require participants to share experiences and perceptions associated with college selection and transfer. I will schedule face-to-face interviews for one hour on the student's home campus. Each student will be asked to complete a demographic survey that will be used to describe general characteristics.

The participating college will not be identified in the study, nor will the names of participants. To grant permission for this study to be conducted on your campus, simply reply, "permission granted" or "yes" to this email request. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. If you have questions or require clarification, please call me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

Regenia Hill
Ph.D. Candidate
Old Dominion University

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Project Title:

Factors Affecting College Choice and Transfer: A Study of the Decision Making Process of Student Veterans

Study Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine factors affecting student veterans' decisions to attend a private for-profit institution of higher education and to investigate why these students later decide to transfer from the private institution to a two-year public or community college.

Purpose of Informed Consent Document:

The purpose of this form is to give you information on the project so that you can make an informed decision about whether to participate or not. Participants will have the opportunity to participate in an interview with the primary researcher. Interviews are expected to last for one hour. Interviews can take place in person at your campus, over the phone, or through the use of teleconferencing technology such as Adobe Connect.

Description of Research Study:

With the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan ending and access to funding through the Post-9/11 GI Bill, research shows that the number of veterans seeking higher education is expected to increase. Veterans have numerous programs and academic institutions from which to choose, including community colleges, four-year public institutions, private not-for-profit four-year colleges, and private for-profit schools. Little research exists on what factors affect college selection and transfer for student veterans. The purpose of this study is to explore this phenomenon by gathering information through interviews from student veterans who enrolled at a private for-profit institution and later transferred to a community college.

If you decide to participate in this study, you are agreeing to participate in an interview. You will have the opportunity to share your experiences and perceptions regarding college selection and transfer.

Informed Consent Agreement:

1. Participation in this study is voluntary.
2. There are no more than minimal risks to you as a participant in this study.
3. You may withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision to do so will not affect your relationship with your community college.

4. If potential problems are observed, the researcher reserves the right to withdraw your participation from the study.
5. You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.
6. Your name will not be associated with your responses or with this study. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations and publication; you will not be identified.
7. There are no right or wrong answers; your opinions are important.
8. Interviews are expected to last for one hour.
9. You will be asked to complete a short demographic data form that will be used only to provide a general description of study participants.
10. Interviews will be audio taped from which a verbatim transcript will be created.
11. You agree to be available for additional interviews and/or follow-up questions.
12. Participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts.
13. Questions about your rights as a research participant or this form should be directed to the investigator at the number or email listed below or to Old Dominion University, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Research Compliance, 4111 Monarch Way, Norfolk, Virginia 23508. Telephone: 757-683-4293.

Thank you for participating. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact:

Regenia Hill   Dr. Dana Burnett, Ed.D

Investigator   Dissertation Committee Chair

Email: rhill@odu.edu   dburnett@odu.edu

Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx   xxx-xxx-xxxx

Please sign to indicate that you have read and understand this informed consent document:

Signature_____

Printed Name_____

Date_____

APPENDIX C

Demographic Survey

Please respond to the following questions by checking the appropriate response in the box.

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Race: ☐ White ☐ Non-White

3. Age: ☐ 20-25 ☐ 26-31 ☐ 32-37 ☐ Older

4. What is your military affiliation?

    ☐ Army ☐ Navy ☐ Marine ☐ Coast Guard ☐ Air Force

5. What is your current military status?

    ☐ Active Duty ☐ Retired

6. What is your current academic level?

    ☐ First Year ☐ Second Year ☐ Third Year ☐ Fourth Year

7. Are you currently using funding from the Post 9/11 GI Bill?

    ☐ Yes ☐ No

8. How long (in years and months) have you served in the U.S. Military? _____

9. Have you attended more than three colleges or universities? If so, how many? _____

10. Are you a first generation college student?

    ☐ Yes ☐ No

Thank you for completing this survey.
Your cooperation and time is greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Scripted Procedures, Questions, and Prompts

"Good morning and thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study.

My research focus is on learning more about what factors student veterans consider when

selecting to attend a private for-profit institution, and what factors are considered when deciding

to transfer to a community college. My hope is that the findings from this study will assist

colleges and universities with the recruitment and retention of student veterans and in developing

policies and programs that will help student veterans complete their academic goals. The

interview will consist of thirteen questions and should take no longer than one hour. You can

stop the interview at any time. As we discussed earlier, the interview will be recorded.

  "At this time, I would like for you to review the consent form. [**PAUSE]** Having reviewed the

consent form, do you have any questions? **{PAUSE]** Your name will not be used in this research

and again your participation, or lack of participation, will not affect your grades or academic

progress. May I turn on the audiotape now?"   **[TAPE ON]**

1. **Tell me why you are pursuing a college degree?**
    Probing Topics
    - Job Advancement
    - To obtain a Job
    - Provide for family
    - Use GI Bill Benefits
    - Family Expectation

2. **What factors determined your decision to attend a private for-profit institution?**
    Probing Topics
    - Online Offerings
    - Program Offerings
    - Academic Rigor
    - Geographical Location
    - Student Services

- Cost
- Admission Requirements
- Friend, Family Influence

3. **What factors influenced your decision to attend this particular private for-profit college?**
   Probing Topics
   - Online Offerings
   - Program Offerings
   - Academic Rigor
   - Geographical Location
   - Student Services
   - Cost
   - Admission Requirements
   - Friend, Family Influence

4. **How long did you attend the private for-profit school and what degree program did you pursue?**

5. **Why did you transfer to a community college?**
   Probing Topics
   - Online Offerings
   - Program Offerings
   - Academic Rigor
   - Geographical Location
   - Student Services
   - Cost
   - Admission Requirements
   - Campus Activities
   - Friend, Family Influence
   - Improve Academic Performance

6. **What factors influenced your decision to attend this particular community college?**
   Probing Topics
   - Online Offerings
   - Program Offerings
   - Academic Rigor
   - Geographical Location
   - Student Services
   - Cost
   - Admission Requirements
   - Campus Activities
   - Friend, Family Influence

7. **How long have you attended your current college?**

8. **What degree program are you currently pursuing?**

9. **Describe the student services available at the private for-profit college.**
   Probing Topics
   - Financial Aid
   - Disability Services
   - Admission
   - Career Services (Placement)
   - Library Services (online services)
   - Technical Assistance with Online Courses
   - Academic Advising

10. **What services/programs were offered specifically for student veterans at the private for-profit college?**
    Probing Topics
    - Financial Aid (GI Bill)
    - Veteran Affairs Office
    - Academic Advising
    - Counseling
    - Disability Services
    - Student Organization for Veterans
    - Veterans Center
    - Job Placement/Career Services

11. **Describe the student services available at your current college.**
    - Financial Aid
    - Disability Services
    - Admission
    - Career Services (Placement)
    - Library Services (online services)
    - Technical Assistance with Online Courses
    - Academic Advising

12. What services/programs are available specifically for student veterans at your current college?

           Probing Topics

- Financial Aid (GI Bill)
- Veteran Affairs Office
- Academic Advising
- Counseling
- Disability Services
- Student Organization for Veterans
- Veterans Center
- Job Placement/Career Services

13. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

14. Would you like to review your interview transcript for accuracy?

If participant response "Yes" to question 14 – inform them that the transcription will be sent to their email address and that they will have a week to make changes or clarify answers.

"Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. Good luck with the rest of the semester."

VITA
Regenia L. Hill
rhill@odu.edu
804-523-5166

Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, 120 Education Building, Norfolk, VA 23529
Education:
B.S., Business Marketing, Radford University, Radford, VA, May 1986
M.S., Higher Education Administration, Radford University, Radford,VA, May 1991
Ph.D., Community College Leadership, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, May 2016

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Regional and Student Success Director, Community Engagement Lead, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, January 2015 – present
- Regional Director for ODU Distance Learning staff at seven community colleges throughout Northeast Virginia; supervise six full-time employees
- Team Lead for twenty-five hourly employees located throughout Virginia
- Responsible for developing community engagement initiatives for all community college site locations throughout Virginia
- Manage partner leadership communications with key administrators throughout the
- Virginia Community College Systems

Regional Director, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, April 2005 – January 2015
- Supervised seven full-service, distance learning centers throughout Northeast Virginia with a combined staff of over thirty professionals, including faculty administrators, classified and hourly employees
- Managed employee recruitment process including hiring, training, and evaluation
- Trained new employees regarding site operations, university procedures and policies, enrollment functions, and marketing strategies
- Coordinated regional outreach activities designed to promote and enhance visibility of Old Dominion University and the Office of Distance Learning
- Assisted the Office of Admissions with the development of on-site transfer and guaranteed admissions policy and procedures for the Office of Distance Learning

Director, Old Dominion University at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Richmond, Virginia January 1998 - 2005
- Provided administrative and academic leadership for the J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College site with semester enrollments between 250-375 registrations
- Managed day-to-day operations, to include, student support services, academic advising of 24 undergraduate and graduate degree programs, staff supervision, program marketing and management of electronic classrooms
- Developed and implemented strategies to recruit prospective students, promoted the university within the community college, and surrounding Richmond area
- Represented ODU at college fairs, conducted information sessions, reviewed and processed admission applications