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A Comparison of Academic Success for Military Associated Students to the General Student
Population at Middle Tennessee Community Colleges

A dissertation
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by
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August 2019

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Keywords: Veteran, Military, Academic Success, Community College

ABSTRACT

A Comparison of Academic Success for Military Associated Students to the General Student Population at Middle Tennessee Community Colleges

by

Kenneth Hanson

Research in military veterans' transition from military service to civilian college indicates that veterans can be successful in college. Considering veterans are generally older than the average traditional student population who attends college after high school, military veterans fit the characteristics of an adult student. Research indicates that the military veteran may be more disciplined and characteristically achieve their academic goals. However the literature is limited in the research of military veteran success in community colleges, and research is inconsistent with regards to the academic success of military veterans. The military veteran population in the present research consisted of 40 students with a comparison to 5,189 students in the general student population. Each of these students was pursuing an associate's degree and were enrolled at 1 of 4 Middle Tennessee community colleges.

The purpose of this comparative quantitative study was to compare the success factors (GPA, fall to fall retention, and graduation rates) of military veterans to the general student population at 4 participating Middle Tennessee community colleges. Data were compiled from historical student-level data consisting of a single cohort. Results of this study pointed to significant differences between the proportion of males and females with a higher proportion of males at the colleges and a lower proportion of females at the same colleges. There was also a significant difference in the use of financial aid-excluding the GI Bill between military veterans and the

general student population. However there was not a significant difference between military veterans and the general student population in consideration of the other success factors such as Grade Point Average (GPA), graduation rates, persistence, and full-time attendance, along with the difference in the age of the military veteran students.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the military members and veterans who inspired me to succeed while I served in the US Air Force and to those military veteran students whom I have assisted in school since my retirement.

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I would like to thank the members of my family who have been a positive influence as I pursued my life goal of earning a doctorate degree. The major supporter of my goal has been my wife Sandra Hanson. I never would have achieved my goals without her support and motivation. Also, my children Ashlee, Amber, and Zachary motivated me even when they didn't realize it. And I would also like to include a thanks to my mother Nadine Hanson, who we lost during the time I was writing this paper. There is no way to thank them all enough for their support.

I would also like to thank Dr. James Lampley, the chair of my dissertation committee, for his patience as I slowly worked through this dissertation. I would also like to thank Dr. Donald Good, Dr. Hal Knight, and Dr. Michael Torrence for serving as the members of my committee.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Military veterans are a unique student demographic attending higher education. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) pointed out that the experiences of veterans while they are in the military affect their situation while in college and they need to process their new situation. They are generally negotiating their change in identity while transitioning to college. These experiences can have an influence on their performance after military service and, in turn, on their performance while in college. The military veteran's learning style may have changed due to discipline learned in military service. Military veterans come from an environment that is highly structured, while professors may teach in an environment that is unstructured (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). This change in life structure is challenging to veterans accustomed to being told how to perform, and now must make all their own decisions. This takes time to adjust to the new environment that is vastly different than their previous environment (Anderson & Goodman, 2014).

When entering the military individuals develop strong personal characteristics while serving in the military. They learn a strong sense of discipline and work ethic along with developing teamwork essential for working in small teams. Early in their career they often learn a high-level of responsibility for the lives of their other service members in their group. These traits build trust between members of the team (Vacchi, 2012). This character development can influence performance in future life experiences. Even though not all military members experience time in a combat zone, there are some experiences of combat that can have a positive

or negative influence on other aspects of life to include attending college (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009).

Many military veterans have transitioned from military service to civilian life and often have attended college after their time in the service. According to Mettler (2005a) after World War II (WWII) military veterans transitioning from military service into civilian life needed to reintegrate into the civilian culture. They were provided a unique opportunity to attend education or training when they returned to their civilian lives. The National Resources Planning Board (NRPB) suggested that men and women who have been discharged from military service “...should be able to secure additional education and training to reequip themselves for the postwar world” (p. 351). Mettler also continues by stating that American citizens wanted to implement measures to ease veterans’ transition back to civilian life. Veterans were considered deserving of this “social provision” (p. 347).

In 1943 President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested that Congress develop a plan for veterans, assisting them with unemployment, insurance, and educational benefits. This plan, developed by the National Resource Planning Board (NRPB) with a strong influence from the American Legion, became the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (Olson, 1973). The goal of these two groups was to develop a program with the anticipation of full employment, continuity of income, and equal access to a higher standard of living, with the key objective to expand it to education and training. The NRPB was also attempting to provide better treatment for the military members returning from war compared to military members from previous wars. It was thought to be better to provide training towards employment than to emphasize paying costly pensions (Mettler, 2005a). This bill was intended to help veterans reintegrate into the civilian workforce. On June 22, 1944, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Service

Members Readjustment Act into law. There is a version of this law still in effect today, known as the GI Bill (US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

The GI Bill brought about a new opportunity for veterans to pay for college or vocational school tuition. According to Altschuler and Blumin (2009), the GI Bill did not discriminate. If military members had served for at least 90 days and did not have a dishonorable discharge from military service they were eligible for the program. This program was used by male and female veterans, and the bill was “colorblind” (p. 118).

Olson (1973) declared that when the GI Bill started there were concerns with veterans attending higher education. One concern from university professors around the time of the implementation of the GI Bill was that they were initially uneasy about married veterans attending college. Other administrators thought colleges would admit unqualified veterans just to increase their enrollment. Olson continued by pointing out that it was thought by some that the provisions of the GI Bill were only an attempt to keep veterans off the bread-line and not as an educational benefit. These views from college faculty and staff seemed to indicate that veterans were not qualified to attend college. However, as veterans began to attend college, research demonstrated that veterans were raising the grade-point averages of students at some schools, indicating that initial perspectives were ill-founded. “Veterans were older, better motivated, and included among their total 10 per cent [sic] who would not have gone to college without the G.I. Bill” (p. 605). Olson continued by pointing out that eventually the GI Bill was considered an overwhelming success, changing the view that married individuals were not acceptable in college and this created overcrowding at colleges due to the overall success of the program.

Even in the early days of the GI Bill there were other indicators it was an effective law, increasing opportunities for veterans’ education. Mettler (2005b) indicated that the GI Bill

improved the chances that veterans would attend college after their time in military service, demonstrating the law was successful within a few years after it was signed. Bound and Turner (2002) argued the GI Bill dramatically reduced the cost for veterans to attend college and the extra stipend reduced other costs associated with attending college. The effect of implementation of the GI Bill for veterans was more profound on student enrollment than the impact of the initial implementation of the Pell grant. They continued by stating that this was due to the ease of the ability to determine eligibility of a veteran, compared to determining the eligibility of an average student applying for the Pell grant.

Olson (1973) pointed out that with the implementation of the GI Bill after WWII, faculty noticed veterans were demonstrating success in higher education. Generally, veterans were nontraditional students, were more motivated, and 10% would not have gone to school if it was not for the GI Bill. In 1946 it was noted that at the University of Minnesota, one half of 1% of veterans were dismissed from college, compared to 10% percent of the average civilian students. At Stanford University the nonveteran students called the veterans “Damn Average Raisers” (p. 605). Studies unanimously concluded that grade-point averages of veterans were higher than their civilian counterparts and relative to their ability (Olson, 1973).

According to Evans, Pellegrino, and Hoggan (2015) veterans’ success in the classroom, should be the focus for community college administrators. Student integration into the campus can be a positive factor in veterans’ success in college. There is also an obligation by faculty and staff to help students stay until graduation. Students’ interactions with teachers and fellow students are more influential than how they are shaped by the advice provided from advisors. Evans et al. suggested creating peer-learning communities to supplant the close-knit networks developed in military service to assist in the transition to college life. Veterans as with

nontraditional student are more likely to be successful in college by attending classes full time. Research suggests that those students attending part time are considered less likely to complete their degree (Tinto, 2012). Considering veterans are often older, have families, and work, there is a higher probability they will attend college on a part-time basis, thereby reducing their chances for success.

Community colleges can be nimble higher education institutions as they attempt to remain competitive by adapting to the needs of their military veteran students. In this regard colleges need to be creative in accommodating military veterans to provide the necessary services and supports to make them successful (Evans et al., 2015). Having veterans on campus is an opportunity to learn methods to fill their unique needs and determine how they can be an asset to the campus. They can enhance the campus culture through quality engagement by discussing their experiences with other students. An added benefit of student veterans attending college is that they also can garner revenues through their earned educational benefits, which can improve the college's bottom line (Kirchner, Coryell, & Yelich Biniecki, 2014).

Academic Success

Academic success is a somewhat nebulous concept. Success in any form can have as many definitions as individuals describing success. For the purpose of this study success is described from the perspective of academic success. Academic success can be an "amorphous construct" with a wide variation of possibilities from program completion to personal improvement (York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2015). York et al. suggested a theoretically grounded definition of academic success that is made up of six components: academic achievement,

satisfaction, acquisition of skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning objectives, and career success.

Student or veteran success is often measured by grade point average (GPA). For example, according to Williams (2015) a higher GPA indicated a higher level of academic success. It is realized that GPA was not the only measure of academic success, but it is a common metric to assess the potential for success. Murphy (2011) determined a higher GPA was an indication of academic success, although not the only indicator.

It is unclear how successful the military veteran student is in higher education. Williams (2015) noted that veterans can be successful in their transition from the military through enrollment in college. Williams then examined demographic characteristics, transition experiences, characteristics, and relationships and how they affected academic success. Success can also be determined through obtaining proficiency in the student's field of study or by earning credits to transfer to another institution (Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2013).

Various factors are used to determine success for students. For example completing a program of study to the point of graduation typically indicates success. In 1990 the U.S. Congress, through the Student Right to Know Act, mandated the tracking of graduation rates at higher education institutions. They were required to calculate and disclose a precise and standard graduation rate within 150% of the normal college graduation rate in which the student was first enrolled (Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act, 1990). To complete a program of study retention is important. Retention is correlated with persistence when attempting to earn a degree in college (Williams, 2015). Some schools have advantages for program completion over other schools. Clothfelter et al. (2013) noted there was often a built-in advantage for those schools that enroll students with a much stronger educational background leading to success.

Military veterans often have unique experiences unfamiliar to other students in the general college population. These veterans' experiences stem from their transition from a highly-structured culture of the military to the college environment that does not have the same structure (Vacchi, 2012). This creates a need for support during their transition and is exacerbated by veterans' lack of knowledge of postsecondary education (Kirchner et al., 2014). Veteran students may experience additional transitional challenges with attending school due to work, individual, and relationship issues and each can affect their performance (Rumann et al., 2010). These issues help to understand military veterans' performance in community college.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this comparative quantitative study was to compare the success factors (GPA, fall to fall retention, and graduation rates) of military veterans to the general student population at four participating community colleges. Veterans' transition from the highly-structured hierarchical culture of the military to community college can be challenging. There have been many studies analyzing veterans' challenges while attending college that include research conducted at community colleges. Kim and Cole (2013) described the challenges veterans experience when they attend college that affect their success. In another study the GI Bill Comparison Tool presents a limited scope when examining veteran student performance while using Veterans Affairs (VA) educational benefits (GI Bill Comparison Tool, 2016). These studies are but a small perspective of veterans' success in college.

Research Questions

Using quantitative methodology, this study was an examination of eight performance indicators of students at participating community colleges. The success indicators were measured from the academic performance of military veterans and students from the general student body. These indicators were evaluated to determine if there were significant differences between these two populations.

Research Question 1: For the fall 2013 semester, is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.748, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Research Question 2: For the spring 2014 semester, is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.632, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Research Question 3: For the fall 2014 semester, is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.753, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Research Question 4: For the spring 2015 semester, is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.819, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Research Question 5: Is the age at enrollment for students who are military veterans significantly different from 21.37, the mean age for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Research Question 6: Is the proportion of military veterans who graduate in 3 years significantly different from the proportion of students in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Research Question 7: Is the proportion of military veterans who are male significantly different from the proportion of students who are male in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Research Question 8: Is the proportion of military veterans who are female significantly different from the proportion of students who are female in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Research Question 9: Is the proportion of military veterans who persist first year fall-to-fall significantly different from the proportion of students who persist first year in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Research Question 10: Is the proportion of military veterans who are on financial aid, excluding GI Bill, significantly different from the proportion of students who are on financial aid in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Research Question 11: Is the proportion of military veterans who attend college full-time for fall 2013 significantly different from the proportion of students in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Significance of Study

Community college administrators and staff should have an understanding of the needs of military veterans who attending their institution. There have been many qualitative studies that

have been conducted, such as Wheeler (2012), that addressed the unique needs of veterans on community college campuses. At the same time a quantitative review brings in more evidence to understand how military veteran students compare to the general student population. A study of this type may assist community college administrators and staff in understanding the unique needs of veterans and how they relate to the general student population. Veterans often struggle making the transition from the military to the civilian college. Veterans commonly fit into high-risk categories such as delayed entry into college, financial independence, employed full-time, part-time enrollment, or having families (Evans et al., 2015).

To identify similarities or differences between military veterans and the general student population, there are reports providing areas of emphasis for community colleges to focus on the efficacy of students in college and military veteran students' transition to college. According to Wheeler (2012) one aspect of the transition is veterans dealing with other students who do not respect their professors, do not take their learning experiences seriously, or are more concerned with social life than classrooms study. These actions can be difficult for veterans to accept and can make integration into college life more difficult. Some universities have recognized veterans struggling with their transition and many have implemented policies to assist in their transition (Kirchner et al., 2014). Other studies limit the comparison of military veterans to the general student population to determine significant factors at a community college.

Limitations and Delimitations

The purpose of this research was to evaluate academic success factors of military veterans at four community colleges in Tennessee. This was to use archival data as a comparison of the academic success factors of military veterans compared to those of the general student

body at these institutions. The results of this study may not be generalizable to other colleges or universities but were an indicator of student veterans' performance at these colleges. Another delimitation is that this study focused on just one cohort of students at the four participating community colleges selected and researched for their success factors. The cohort was selected to encompass a complete 3-year time frame of study to ensure there is a 150% of the time to complete a 2-year associate degree.

Definitions of Terms

To help understand basic terms used in this research, the following definitions are used:

Financial Aid-Federal and state funding to assist individual students with costs associated with college attendance. This study focuses on the use of financial aid such as Pell grant and excludes the Department of Veterans Affairs GI Bill and associated educational benefits.

Military Transition-The period when a student veteran transitions from time in military service to attending civilian college. As stated by Jones (2013), it is "The challenges of adapting to the open environment to higher education after time spent in the severely regimented life of an active duty military service member" (p. 11). It is also the process of veteran reintegration to civilian life including vocational, interpersonal, and adjustment to new roles in life (Yan et al., 2012).

Student Success-The completion of a program of study. To be more specific, in the Student Right to Know Act (1990), a part of 20 U.S. Code § 1092, students are counted as graduating if they complete their program within 150% of the normal time to complete a program of study or the prior program provides substantial preparation.

Student Veteran-Any student who has served in the military service of the United States of America. This includes students who have served either in the Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard. Their service is either active duty, reserves, or National Guard. These students have either provided documentation indicating their military service, generally through a DD 214 form indicating separation from service, or through self-identification as a military veteran. In accordance with the Higher Education Act of 1965, section 480 (c)(A) and (B), a veteran is anyone who “has engaged in the active duty in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard”, and “was released under condition other than dishonorable” (Higher Education Act of 1965, 2017).

Overview of Study

This study includes five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, statement of the problem, and significance of the research. Chapter 2 presents a literature review of the history of veterans transitioning to civilian college, academic performance indicators of general students, and transition issues of veterans. Chapter 3 presents the methodology, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Chapter 5 offers a conclusion and discussion of the results and the implications for future research, policy, and practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pursuing a program of study at an institute of higher education can be a daunting challenge for students when they do not know what to expect. According to Tinto (2012) first generation students lack the shared knowledge or cultural capital known to other students with families with college experience. First generation students are often frightened away from starting a program of study because of the time considerations, financial costs, and the fear of feeling under prepared for higher education. When a student decides to begin a program of study and has challenges they feel incapable of continuing the program. Tinto (2015) also pointed out that these challenges can be overcome by the individual with support of family, friends, and the college itself through functions such as an orientation. Veteran military students sometimes have unique challenges in regard to transition to civilian college that are not experienced by the average student population. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) noted that some veterans were recognized to have “role incongruities” (p. 440) between their time in the military and their new life in academics. They also had lingering stress and anxiety because of returning to school.

Influence of Military Service

Since 1973 the American military armed forces have been an all-volunteer force following a recommendation from President Richard Nixon’s Commission, known as the Gates Commission, and Congress refusing to extend the draft (Yuengert, 2016). All service members entering the U.S. armed forces since 1973 began their career by volunteering for military service as they have not been conscripted into it. Military members encounter very disparate experiences

throughout their time in service. Some military members experience combat in active war zones, others experience a peacetime existence with little time away from home, while others have experiences somewhere in between. This makes for a wide variety of perspectives of military service and how it may affect or influence lives. Considering the variations in experiences, military members are strongly influenced by their experiences in the service, thereby affecting them in a respectively individualistic manner. Almost every person who enters the military and stays for a considerable amount of time exits as a different person. Transitioning back to civilian life then creates unexpected challenges unique to veterans.

The military culture is a highly-structured environment. When students make a transition to civilian college there often is a realization that the time spent in service was a positive influence on their personal academic experience. Veteran students do not want to fail classes, often in concern of potentially losing educational benefits, and tend to have a higher sense of respect for their professors due to military training (Wheeler, 2012). Another consideration is that after serving in the military and joining the ranks of the civilian college, military veterans complained about missing the chain of command they had experienced in the service (Kirchner, 2015).

Many motivators influence individuals to join the military. Some military members express “wanting to do my duty” (Ackerman et al., 2009, p. 6), especially since the attacks of September 11, 2001. Some veterans join due to the influence of generational military service. Others serve due to the enticement of a challenge or are seeking to escape something in their lives or to find a change. Still others need financial support to attend college or are looking for a better life for their families (Ackerman et al., 2009).

Just because a person served in the military does not imply that time was spent in a war zone or in active combat. However the service members who served in a war zone had the potential for experiencing a traumatic or distressing situation. As Anderson and Goodman (2014) synthesized, these experiences can be a challenge for some returning veteran students, thereby creating an additional challenge for these veterans while attending college.

For some individual war zone experiences impact their transition back to civilian life. Ackerman et al. (2009) stated that there is a relationship between experiences while serving in a war zone and the transition to college. One factor influencing service members was they may have had to implement and witness serious actions while in a war zone. Another aspect was that a combat area can be a stressful environment and some members “had participated in, witnessed, or heard of horrific events” (p. 8). When transitioning to civilian college there was a relearning of leadership skills they used in the military to be successful in their new challenges. Female service members experienced other challenges in the military that influenced their transition to college, such as learning how to navigate the complex social and work situations to earn acceptance in a majority male environment while serving in a war zone. For males and females these experiences of living through military service and potentially a war zone then turn into challenges of just fitting in while transitioning to becoming a college student.

Military veterans have many positive learning experiences during their military service that are not encountered by the average student in higher education. These experiences can be beneficial to veterans’ learning. “The experiences gained by student veterans/service members outside higher education could moderate the gains possible in postsecondary education, in comparison with nonveteran/civilian students who have fewer real-world experiences” (Kim & Cole, 2013, p. 12). Veterans can use their real-world experiences associated with the military as

a scaffolding for continued learning. Other students who are not associated with the military do not have these same experiences, thereby also limiting the gains by nonveterans. Military service creates opportunities often underestimated by the veteran and the instructor of the class or staff working with the veteran.

Because of their military service veterans generally start college at a later age than the typical student, they are usually considered nontraditional students while attending college. Typically traditional students continue their education immediately after high school the veteran often decides to enlist in the military first, then attend college or community college after serving time in the military. The service time may be 2 or more years depending on the enlistment period. As noted by Kim and Cole (2013), veterans and service members are usually older than traditional students. They have responsibilities outside of their studies, such as family, children, or current career, thereby diminishing their opportunities for experiences on campus compared to the freedom for traditional-aged college students. Some veterans contend with visible and invisible injuries they received while in military service. Depending on their situation and injuries, these may have an impact on their performance in college.

The age of the veteran can also be influential. As previously stated enlisted veterans and those attending community college often do not start college immediately after high school. Their choice is to start a career with the military then continue college later in life. Some veterans are 25 years old or older and meet the characteristics of an adult student. Only 15% of student veterans are between 18-23 when they start college (Parks, Pikowsky, & Hayes, 2014). To provide a perspective, adult students comprise 40% of the total enrollment of US community colleges, and those students over 50 comprise 5% of the student population. Of the student

veterans, 60% are married with children or single parents, and 60% are between 24 and 39 years of age (Vacchi, 2014).

Gender is another factor to be considered. In the United States military, females are in the minority. At the end of the draft in 1973 only 2% of the military were female. As of 2016 females increased to 16% of the enlisted force and 18% of the officer force (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). Generally it is the enlisted members who attend community college since officers generally have already earned their bachelor degree. As per the Tennessee Higher Education Commission Factbook, 2015-2016 for community colleges, 58.8% of the student population was female. This percentage of females attending community colleges are quite different than the percentage of females serving in the United States military (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2016).

Age differences in a college classroom can be a factor for veterans because of the degree of disconnection from their classmates who are traditional aged students. Veterans may feel that traditional students do not have worldly experience or a sense of responsibility, as the veteran has earned through years of military service. This perspective creates a sense of frustration for the veteran, causing challenges with focus within the classroom (Parks et al., 2014). Veterans have developed a strong sense of discipline and garnered many worldly experiences while serving in the military. This sense of discipline helps them with their learning but their expectations for the traditional student to meet the same level of discipline and maturity causes challenges for the veteran student to effectively learn. The veteran student may feel “aged out” of the activities associated with nontraditional students who lack the experiences of the veteran student. Because veterans feel older than the traditional students this causes them to focus on

other nonacademic activities that are more valuable to their life instead of focusing on completing their program of study (Kim & Cole, 2013).

Some students still serve in the military while attending higher education. Military service often orders members to deploy to other locations around the globe while they are registered for classes, thereby requiring changes to schedules or the need to withdraw from college courses. When these changes are made, there is an additional difficulty of dealing with college-related administrative tasks at the same time as negotiating the military requirements to prepare for deployment (Ackerman et al., 2009).

Impact of GI Bill on Veteran Performance

The GI Bill had a substantial impact on higher education. By 1947-1948 over 2.2 million veterans used the GI Bill (Olsen, 1973). Veterans using the GI Bill accounted for 70% of the male enrollment after the end of WWII (Bound & Turner, 2002). Overall, 51% percent of WWII veterans used the GI Bill, equating to 2.2 million pursuing college or graduate level education and 5.6 million pursuing vocational or on the job training after the war (Mettler, 2005b). Between 1940 and 1952 there was an estimated increase of college completion by 20%. It was then extrapolated that there was a 40% college completion rate by veterans compared to prewar estimates (Bound & Turner, 2002). This indicated that military service could have a positive effect on education and training attainment.

The GI Bill program has been successful in increasing the opportunities for education and training for military veterans. However it was soon realized there were negative consequences because of the success of this program. Schools of dubious integrity began to develop with the goal of collecting tuition from the GI Bill (Levine & Levine, 2011). These schools showed little

interest in the quality of education for the veterans attending their programs, and they were only interested in the collection of tuition payments sponsored by the United State Government. After the GI Bill was signed into law in 1944, a congressional committee was established to investigate the use of the GI Bill. The committee noticed tuition prices at schools were being inflated for veterans because these schools knew the government was covering their costs (Patton, 2012). The schools were taking advantage of veterans' education and training chances, potentially negatively affecting their reintegration into civilian life.

In 1950 a federal investigation was conducted to review the practices of for profit or proprietary schools. As a response to this investigation, a new rule was instituted to limit the revenues generated from the GI Bill. No schools could have more than 85% of their revenue from the government funded GI Bill. This rule is still in place today to garner oversight of schools authorized to use the GI Bill. Even considering these issues with the GI Bill, the history of this act has overall been successful. The GI Bill created the financial resources for veterans to obtain education and training, but it was still up to the individual veteran to achieve academic success in the classroom (Mitchell, 2015).

Over time the GI Bill adapted to the recruitment needs of the military and continued to provide educational opportunities for military veterans. The Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952 was the legislation that enacted the Korean Conflict GI Bill. Of the 5.5 million veterans of this era, 2.4 million were trained using this GI Bill, of which 1.2 million attended colleges and universities. The total cost of the bill was \$4.5 billion. The Post Korean GI Bill educated and trained 1.4 million of the 3 million veteran population. The Vietnam Era veterans' population was 10.3 million veterans with education and training for 4.3 million students. The

Veterans Education Assistance Program (VEAP) provided funding for 668,000 veterans to receive vocational training (Montgomery, 1994).

In 1984 the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1984 was signed into law to create the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB), which allowed military members to elect to pay into a new GI bill (Veterans Benefits Improvement Act, 1984; US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). By 1994, 96.7% of all new service members elected to pay for the new GI Bill. Between the implementation of the MGIB in 1985 and 1994, 1.5 million active duty recruits enrolled in the program and 430,000 attended schools. The selected reserves version of the MGIB provided an option for members of the Military Reserves, and state National Guard. Almost 320,000 reservists used this program during the same time frame (Montgomery, 1994). In 2008, congress passed the Post 9/11 GI Bill, significantly increasing the benefit payments for education or training (US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

Student Characteristics of a Veteran

Veterans may perceive their status as nontraditional students because of their time and experience in the military as an advantage towards success in college. The military can hone confidence and self-reliance and increase discipline towards success. Serving in the military has shown to assist in developing goal orientation, time management, stress tolerance, along with developing strong social networking and developing a professionalism that can be beneficial towards academic success (Norman et al., 2015). Veterans develop maturity and a stronger sense of the world because of their experiences in the military; however, this also creates a feeling of being disconnected from their peers in college due to the perception that the other students lack this maturity (Williams, 2015). Williams also argued that veteran students are a valuable

component at an institution of higher education; therefore, the school should find ways to better serve them.

Veterans or individual students with military experience develops an identity associated with the military service in which they served. This identity is assimilated through the training and military culture faced and is indoctrinated by the military as essential to success of military missions. Because of these experiences, these former military members strongly identify with their particular military service, thereby carrying this identity with them through future experiences. Any person's identity is shaped powerfully by culture and the military culture is strongly influential to a military veteran's character. Culture influences every part of personal character (Duckworth, 2016). Veterans bring some of their military identity with them as they transition to higher education. Transition from military service can be a critical component affecting military veterans as they proceed into higher education because they identify with military service and it can affect future decisions.

This military identity is not always understood in the classroom environment. According to Vacchi (2014), "it is important to understand that student veterans have been powerfully and positively socialized to the military culture" (p. 115). This identity and experience needs to be taken into consideration when delivering instruction for veteran students. The approaches used with traditional students may not be effective with the veteran student. The same actions could alienate the veteran reducing his or her chances of learning the subject.

Higher education administrators should focus on developing an understanding of the veteran student. There is a disparity between a veteran and the traditional and other nontraditional students. Veterans are not as likely to invest their energy in areas of study such as study abroad, internships, and community service.

These high-impact experiential programs and services may not fit the needs of veterans and service members because these students are more likely than nonveteran/civilian students to have responsibilities away from campus that compete for their time. Also, veterans and service members already bring with them valuable real-life experiences from the military that may make these high impact programs less relevant. (Kim & Cole, 2013, p. 18)

Veterans' decision to attend college after serving in the military creates challenges to their pursuit of an education. Wheeler (2012) posited that veteran students often have a delayed entry into higher education. There is a correlation between starting college later in life and program noncompletion. Because veterans often start later in life, there are varying reasons for the decision to attend a community college first. Some attend because of the lower cost at a community college, while others choose community college for specific academic reasons fitting their situation or for remedial classes or lower-class sizes. Cole-Martin (2013) stated there was a concern to train personnel to take care of veterans and to make an effort to properly assist veterans. For example, administrators can ensure veterans are taking the necessary academic courses for their program of study and help them determine methods to pay for their college.

Pellegrino and Hoggan (2015) indicated that counselors, faculty, and staff should consider professional development in regard to supporting veterans. There are often unintended institutional barriers to college success for veterans or nontraditional students. Veterans perceive a difficulty fitting into the campus community because of institutional barriers. These barriers are due to policies and procedures written to focus on the traditional students creating barriers to the veterans' success. These barriers are often regarding the veterans extended age, maturity level due to military service, and their disciplined characteristics of timeliness to class and decorum

during classroom activities (Norman et al., 2015). These characteristics can also have a positive impact. Success in postsecondary education can be positively affected by the age of the student attending college programs (Godrick-Rab, 2010).

There are other factors potentially affecting veteran or student success in college that must be considered. Some students are less likely to clearly understand how to negotiate college social or academic context because of growing up in a socioeconomically disadvantaged family background. Transition to community college can also be affected by family background, sociodemographic characteristics, and the student's education expectations (Godrick-Rab, 2010). Researchers also noted how delays in payments from the GI Bill for tuition create an obstacle for these veterans (Norman et al., 2015).

Considering the challenges affecting veterans in higher education institutions, positive outcomes have also been observed. In a study by Williams (2015) military and veteran students showed signs of grit and perseverance and had a unique perspective of the campus community. Sometimes there are other factors to be indicators of success. High school GPA, self-efficacy, and an intrinsic interest in education were determined to be reliable indicators of success in college. The intrinsic interest is important to consider especially during the transition from the military (De La Garza, Manuel, Wood, & Harris, 2016).

Other factors to consider with veterans is the training they receive in military service. Military service requires service members to prepare for unpredictable situations. Even the lowest ranking individual in the military could be called upon to lead others in unusual situations in preparation for the possibility of war. Vacchi (2012) pointed out that the military services provide leadership training and development for their service members throughout their career. Military service also emphasizes each individual taking initiative and high levels of discipline

and teamwork. Vacchi also pointing out that a side effect of this enculturation is the veteran generally does not want to be the weak link on the team. “Failure is not an option for these veterans and being a burden to anyone, such as professors, or campus administrators, brings back the specter of being the weak link on a military team” (p. 18). This perspective can affect the veteran student’s performance in the classroom if at any time the veteran feels like the weak link or is portrayed as weak. Because of this military members develop a strong sense of trust among each other. Veterans learn that trust is important to teamwork. Vacchi (2012) stated,

A frustrating circumstance for veterans when reentering civilian society is that it is hard for veterans to earn a similar level of trust and responsibility from the average American as veterans enjoyed while in the military. Many Americans have little understanding or appreciation for the level of responsibility, training, discipline, and competence of the US military personnel. (p. 18)

According to Vacchi this becomes critical for faculty and staff to understand the importance of trust with veterans. Veterans often are responsible for life or death situations within their military career. They build trust with their fellow service members and leaders. If a veteran is shown disrespect by faculty or staff members, it becomes frustrating for him or her to focus on the learning process. Veterans more than traditional students expect to trust their professors and staff members while also expecting trust in return. A lack of trust by or towards veterans, then creates roadblocks to learning. An example could be if a professor offers opinions about a subject they are not qualified to give. If the professor has not been to Iraq and offers an opinion that Iraqi citizens do not want us there and the veteran believes otherwise, then the professor has created a hostile classroom environment in the perspective of the veteran (Vacchi, 2012).

Schlossberg Transition Model

The Schlossberg Transition model can provide a framework for college administrators to understand veterans' transition. Pelligrino and Hoggan (2015) researched veterans and how coping with transition could be modeled by the Schlosberg 4S model. There are many reasons veterans start their transition. The first S to discuss is Situation. For the veteran in transition the Situation is the trigger of a student wanting to make a change, such as earning a degree, creating a need to separate from the military. The Self factor in the 4S model considers a multitude of personal traits and how a person internalizes characteristics such as motivation, self-efficacy, and strengths and weaknesses. The Support factor is generally the person's system of support from others. For veterans this may be spouses, family, friends, or groups helping them through their transition period. The final factor is Strategies. The Strategies are often coping methods to alleviate stress, time management, or deal with their academic struggles.

Veterans have to contend with many issues when making the transition to community college. Examples identified through Pelligrino and Hoggan (2015) include affordable child care, transportation, and retention in school. Veteran students also identified a need for better counseling services fitting their needs and better academic preparation before starting their journey.

In another case study by Anderson and Goodman (2014), each of the 4S factors varied, causing different responses from the individual making the transition. In one case, a student planned on having a future in the military, expected to get married, and have a well-planned life. However the member's plans changed dramatically as the result of an injury after 2 years of service causing the member to separate early from the military, lose a fiancé, and develop a change in life expectations. Injuries incurred by a veteran could change each aspect of the 4S

method, or in this case the Situation. The Self would be different in that the injuries change the person's view of self. Support would be changed because there is a need for the normal support during transition along with support for injuries incurred. The Strategies for coping with a change in life would be altered because there would be a need to find a way to make it in their new lifestyle. The strategies would need to be tailored to the individual's new situation.

Anderson and Goodman argued, "Schlossberg's 4-S Model provides a framework to incorporate the multiple resources and deficits that have an impact on the client's situation, self, support, and strategies" (p. 44).

The transition model provides a framework for understanding the challenges veterans experience when transitioning from military service to civilian college (Anderson et al., 2014). In this case the veteran is attempting to reintegrate into the classroom after potentially years away from civilian school. In the personal transition process the veteran is dealing with issues of normalizing to a changed culture and working to fit the cultural expectations of others in the classroom and by instructors (Parks et al., 2014). College campuses are uniquely different from the environment of a combat zone. The camaraderie experienced by veterans in combat or in training for military service has a lasting effect and is very different from experiences on a college campus.

Leaving a combat zone and entering a university setting presented returning soldiers with unfamiliar and disorienting situations. Participants reported experiencing culture shock both in response to the physical characteristics of the university and as a result of the attitudes and questions of classmates. (Parks et al., 2014, p. 22)

Cultural transition from military to civilian college can influence the veteran student's performance in regards to academic success. As Parks et al. described that veterans were

attempting to reintegrate into civilian college and normalize with others in the classroom while meeting cultural expectations. Depending on the veteran's experience this reintegration can either be a positive or negative experience, often due to their relationships with others on the college campus.

There are often challenges for veterans relating to others in the classroom. Veterans develop a maturity while in military service that the general student population may not experience. Veterans, whether combat or not, are held to a higher level of responsibility at a younger age than their nonveteran peers. Another situation is for veterans who have experienced combat and have experienced extraordinary circumstances with a potential affect to their cognitive abilities. Both situations mean the veteran may have a difficult time relating to nonveteran peers in the classroom especially civilian students who recently graduated from high school. This makes it a challenge to adapt to campus life. Veterans may notice challenges reengaging with the communities they left when they entered military service (Kim & Cole, 2013).

A veteran's progress in his or her transition from military service could have an effect on college success. The Schlossberg model can provide a guide to the level of transition the veteran may have experienced. Even though veterans may have aspects of military transition to deal with, the challenges of this transition are not an indication of the future performance of the individual veteran student. Some aspects of this transition may be positive as well as a negative, depending on the individual veteran and their personal situation. These challenges should not be held against the individual veteran student's performance but be used as a guide to understand the unique challenges experienced by veterans.

College Experience

Community colleges are well-designed to attract and recruit student veterans. Veteran students generally fit into the category of adult learners' due to their maturity developed during military service and entering college at an increased age. These students then fit into the nontraditional student category, and community colleges are often geared towards serving this category of students, making community colleges an attractive alternative for a college education (Rumann et al., 2011).

Community colleges were not always adept in meeting the unique needs of the veterans attending campus. As noted by Persky and Oliver (2010), there is concern for streamlining the process for awarding credit for earned military experience. Veterans can receive credit for their military service either through the Joint Service Transcript for the Army, Marines, Navy, and Coast Guard, whereas Air Force members receive credit through the Community College of the Air Force. This is helpful for students achieving their educational goals faster and enticing the veteran student to remain until completion of the education program. Some schools have established a veterans' center to offer a welcoming place for veterans to gather so they can build camaraderie with their military peers. Persky and Oliver also expressed concerns about validating an actual veteran friendly campus. This type of campus demonstrates legitimate support for veterans by listening and helping veterans meet their educational goals.

One of the concerns realized for college campuses is that there should be an awareness of the veteran students' perceptions of college life while attending school. Many veterans have a feeling of being isolated from other traditional and some nontraditional students. Part of this feeling stems from feeling alone due to multiple factors. Veterans transitioning to college feel uncomfortable in a new environment. Others feel isolated due to not knowing what social

activities are available at the campus. Still others purposely isolate themselves from other traditional students because of the desire to earn an education and they have a perspective of not attending college to make friends (Wheeler, 2012). Pellegrino and Hoggan (2015) argued that scholars should investigate the faculty-veteran relationship and the associated impacts on the success of student veterans attending community college.

A college orientation is also a vital source of information for veterans to acquaint themselves with college and campus life. An orientation assists the student in understanding processes and concepts such as Financial Aid and the registration process (Evans et al., 2015). At some schools, there is a full-day orientation for traditional students. This type of orientation is sometimes looked upon negatively by veteran students who are more concerned with being able to find locations on campus. In some cases the orientation does not fit the veterans' requirements or needs to start college. Veterans find their way through college because they depend upon their military training and experiences (Wheeler, 2012). Some veterans still consider an orientation to be helpful, yet at the same time other students who did not attend orientation felt the school was unhelpful and these students had a negative attitude about college (Evans et al., 2015).

Community colleges often provide valuable resources for veterans as they get accustomed to academic rigors of a postsecondary classroom. It is important for different offices, services, and professionals to understand the unique challenges and concerns that veterans incurred while attending college. School policies and procedures should be developed relating to administering veterans' information and benefits (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Rumann et al., 2011). These policies and procedures should meet the challenges of the veteran students' unique needs without inadvertently alienating them from the learning process.

Veterans Affairs Certifying Official (VACO) are an integral part of a higher education institution when it comes to processing GI Bill benefits. Wheeler (2012) explained how the institutional VACO was given mixed views in the students' perspectives in regard to processing GI Bill benefits. Veterans were frustrated at a lack of staffing versus a lack of respect for the position. Complaints were formed due to not being able to communicate with the VACO personally when there was an issue, or in their opinion, not always receiving a clear explanation of GI Bill benefits. Converse to this, veterans using the GI Bill regarded it as a positive and motivating factor in the importance of transitioning to civilian college (Norman et al., 2015). Comparatively, federal loans often hindered rather than helped persistence in community college (McKinney & Burrige, 2015). Sometimes the use of Veterans Affairs benefits created negative financial challenges for students, thereby affecting academic success (Williams, 2015). Considering these factors higher education should be sensitive to the challenges veterans face, thereby increasing the use of veterans' benefits and the return on investment of the billions of dollars spent to implement the GI Bill (O'Rourke, 2013).

Regarding services offered most veterans are appreciative of the services offered by VACO on campus (Ackerman et al., 2009). Relationships are developed with staff in some veterans' services offices. Other times there are criticisms of the performance of veterans' services officers on other campuses. Some campuses are considered veteran-friendly and others are not. These affected the opinions of the veteran students attending the college (Ackerman et al.). Veterans identified the VACO as the primary person looked to for support during a transition to college. Students experience institutional bureaucracy issues along with a lack of a concerted effort on the part of the faculty and staff, which can make veterans feel as if they do not matter on the campus (Rumann et al., 2011).

Research regarding veteran student performance demonstrates some differences in the performance of veteran students compared to the average college student. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) conducted an annual survey in 2012 of 288,000 first-year and senior full-time students at institutions within the United States. Some of the data demonstrated that veteran students were more likely to spend at least 10 hours per week in preparation for class (70% veteran vs. 65% nonveteran). Student veterans 25 years old and older were less likely to study with peers to prepare for assignments (68% veteran vs. 75% nonveteran). Veterans and service members were also more likely to be first-generation college students (62% veteran vs. 43% nonveteran) (Kim & Cole, 2013).

Veterans are highly trained individuals who are socialized to avoid failure and to handle any challenges that come their way. However when veterans transition from military service their lives change. This culture change is not what many have anticipated. What seems like a simple transition becomes an unexpected challenge. Vacchi (2012) stated that “If a veteran chooses to go to college after military service, this may be the most difficult leap for a veteran, as the campus is not the highly-structured team-based environment of the military” (p. 18). This becomes the challenge for the veteran and for the higher education institution staff to support the veteran.

Educational Program Completion and Graduation

The completion rates of traditional students are comparable to the rates of adult learners at 2-year colleges. Those adults who begin school later in life, generally between the ages of 25-64, are more likely to earn a certificate than their associate degree. A reason the adult chooses the certificate is the time it takes to complete the program of study. Because of their priorities in

life the adult chooses to pursue a program of study part-time thereby challenging the ability to complete the program of study. Fifty-nine percent choose part time because 23% are parents, and 33% work full time, which creates challenges to full-time attendance. Financially, 47% of adult students are independent from their parents and live on their own (Swett & Culp, 2014).

Community colleges incur negative press when justifying their ability to produce a reasonable graduation rate. Students from any educational background are accepted, providing a challenge for a community college to report a reasonable graduation rate. Other issues consist of students transferring to a 4-year institution prior to completion of their program of study.

Another issue making other institutions seem more productive with graduation rates is that some institutions enroll students with stronger educational backgrounds. This creates a built-in advantage for these institutions to achieve higher graduation rates, at the same time it is not an indication of these school's ability to educate students. Community colleges, on the other hand, serve a population that is more diverse. Many community college students attend college part-time in an attempt to balance family, work, and school obligations (Clotfelter et al., 2013).

Veteran students' personal experiences, from military service to their increased age, can influence college performance. Issues such as age, family, work, and personal challenges can be negative to their educational success. At the same time, personal discipline learned in the military can positively motivate the veteran to academic success. Considering his or her military service, the veteran has a strong potential for academic success due to a heightened sense of mission accomplishment if unreasonable obstacles do not challenge his or her success. As a positive for the veteran student, "...history suggests that student veterans not only adjust well to campus, but equal or best their nonveteran peers in the classroom on their way to earning their degrees" (Vacchi, 2012, p. 16). Veterans are more likely to persist in a community college. To

strengthen their likelihood for success, it is suggested that adults receive necessary counseling and intrusive advising financial aid that is focused on their financial needs to complete college (Swett & Culp, 2014).

Faculty and Staff Development to Support Veterans

According to Norman et al. (2015) faculty, staff, and higher-level administrators need to understand the life of a military veteran. For example, faculty members need to understand why some veterans choose to sit at a particular desk in the classroom. This could be so that they can have a visual of every entrance and exit in the classroom for safety reasons. Kirchner (2015) described how veterans may not have an interest in talking about their military experience. Veterans may also feel uncomfortable being the lone representative from the armed forces in the classroom. Faculty members should be cognizant of creating a safe atmosphere for veteran students to be successful. Kirchner (2015) pointed out how adult educators should consider creating an etiquette in the classroom of respecting veteran students and being sensitive to comments from nonmilitary students about wars, government, and military. These can be sensitive issues for veterans and educators should intervene and redirect the conversation to create a safe environment for veterans.

As an additional consideration of professional development, Persky and Oliver (2010) identified a need for training for faculty, counselors, and advisors on being sensitive to veterans' issues. These faculty and administrators should understand disorders encountered by veterans such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Other difficulties veterans contend with are the immaturity of other students within the classroom or being treated disrespectfully by some faculty. College administrators should focus on building confidence in the academic ability for

veterans, considering these students may have been away from education for a while (De La Garza et al., 2016).

According to Evans et al. (2015) professional development should also consider the physical, mental, or emotional challenges due to the veterans' time in service. Veterans' injuries may not always be visible. These injuries could be internal injuries these students may not want to express. Existing school staff and faculty should be aware of personal obstacles veteran students may be struggling with to adjust to civilian college. Building programs to support the needs of veterans helps develop a veteran friendly campus (Evans et al., 2015).

At some point professional development can occur as a simple awareness of issues veterans may face in college. For example, Rumann et al. (2011) argued how campuses should raise an awareness of veterans' issues and concerns through campus forums. This effort to raise awareness should not be left to just one staff member on campus or potentially through a small group of faculty members with ties to the military. There needs to be a concerted effort to point out the unique needs of veterans by all campus members.

As a part of direct support for veteran students, campuses can establish a veterans' resource center or a veterans' student club. The resource center can provide a risk-free atmosphere for veteran students to build support from like-minded peers. A veteran oriented student club such as the nationwide Student Veterans of America (SVA) created in 2008 can provide support for military students. This is an opportunity to meet with peers without the concern for a substantial time commitment. It provides an opportunity for veterans to connect with each other while on campus (Kirchner, 2015). The purpose of the SVA on campus is to provide a peer-to-peer network along with connect veterans to resources and be an advocate for veterans on campus (Rumann et al., 2011). According to Griffin and Gilbert (2015) it is

important for veterans to have representation in the student body. This can be provided through veteran-specific groups and services.

Campuses should have an understanding of the veterans' transition from a highly-structured military service to the less structured college environment. This has been researched to fit within the Schlossberg Transition Model. This model is not a predictive model but a model to describe the process a person experiences and describe the transition period. It consists of the 4S model of Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies to be successful. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) argued how the transition model consists of the individual's situation-which is particular to this person; Self-which includes environment, personality, gender, ethnicity, and age; Support-inclusive of individual support or social support from others; and strategies-to determine his or her plans for how to make a transition. This model provides a framework other authors have considered to understand the process veterans contend with after leaving military service.

Academic Success of Veterans

Research indicated varying results regarding the academic success of veterans. For example, some of the confusion is induced by the limited data on a national level regarding student veterans' postsecondary academic outcomes, which can also be difficult to analyze and interpret (Cate, 2014). The completion rate for veterans from the 2010 National Survey of Veterans showed a postsecondary completion rate of 66%-68%, while the 2012 American Community Survey showed veterans completing at least some college at 56%. The disparity of reporting is "due to poor collection methods, narrow inclusion criteria, and mistakes in

identifying student veterans” (p. 13). These challenges with available data create inaccuracies in reporting the facts about student veterans’ performance.

This group has military obligations delaying their enrollment in college and are considered nontraditional students (Cate, 2014). According to Kim & Cole (2013) veterans have a higher inclination to be first generation college students in comparison to other students. Considering these factors alone, veterans possess the characteristics leading to a propensity to not finish a college degree. According to Ford and Vignare (2015) there are numerous persistence risk factors that can potentially negatively affect student veterans’ educational journey. These risk factors include situations such as raising children and having a spouse, not living on a college campus, working a full-time job while attending school, and attending college part time. Other issues affecting veterans’ education are that they potentially have lower education aspirations, are less academically prepared for college level academics, and may only have a GED compared to a high school diploma. Another critical factor is that veterans often lack knowledge of how to navigate the confusing college application and administrative processes, thereby making the aspects of starting a postsecondary education intimidating.

Considering that veterans are nontraditional students, they can be distinguished through certain characteristics. These may include delayed college entry, attending part time, being financially independent, working full time while attending college, having a spouse, children, or being a single parent, or not earning a high school diploma. The nontraditional student can be further identified as minimally nontraditional with one or more characteristics, moderately nontraditional with two or three characteristics, or highly nontraditional with four or more of these listed characteristics (U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). In this description the level of how veteran

students can be characterized as nontraditional students provides an indicator of the challenges they may face when attending college. The higher level of these characteristics could correlate to the lack of success in higher education. Tinto (2012) indicated that a student involved with school academically or socially with faculty, staff, and peers from the campus has a higher chance of success. Tinto also pointed out that 40% of students attending part time at a 2-year college leave without a degree within 3 years of enrolling.

Research has been conducted to analyze veterans beyond the 3-year period. Student veterans' performances were analyzed through the Million Records Project in 2014. It was determined that many veterans took longer than 3 years to complete their associate's degree. Cate (2014) analyzed veteran students' post-secondary education records and discovered 89.7% initially earned an associate's degree, while 35.8% went on to earn a higher degree. The report determined it took veterans on average 5.1 years to complete an associate's degree, with the median timeframe being 4 years and the highest frequency of degree completion of 2 years. This creates a concern in using the normal 150% of the time to complete a degree, as is analyzed in most research, as researchers may be missing a group of veterans who took 5 or more years to complete their degree. In other cases, some analysts use inaccurate tracking methodology when accomplishing their research, thereby not coming up with accurate results of student veteran success in postsecondary education.

In other research veteran students using the GI Bill have been tracked for higher education performance factors through the GI Bill Comparison Tool. For example, through the GI Bill Comparison Tool (2017) retrieved data from the Department of Education College Scorecard and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). While comparing 2-year community colleges in Tennessee, it was discovered the median retention rates for veteran

students attending full time were 73.79% in the GI Bill Comparison Tool and 73.58% using the IPEDS data. Part time retention rates were 54.71% in the GI Bill Comparison and 54.96% using the IPEDS data. Comparing this to IPEDS nonveteran data, full-time retention rates were 53.12% and part-time rates were 40.92%. Persistence rates for veteran students were 85.22% for full time and 67.39% for part time. Graduation rates were 26.40% for full-time students and 20.11% for part-time. Comparing this data, it was realized that veterans' academic success for this time frame was reasonable. This of course in no way is indicative of the results from any one postsecondary education institution.

No one indicator can predict the academic success of any group of students. Characteristics of a nontraditional student, such as the military veteran, predispose him or her to numerous challenges while attending higher education. On the other hand, veterans develop positive characteristics that potentially benefit them when pursuing college. Military veterans are trained to be responsible for their actions while in the military. This propensity toward responsibility develops the characteristic of maturity at often a younger age than the average adult. Veterans also discover their training often positively affects their college experience. Veterans' experiences influenced performance within their programs.

Military members are typically receiving vocational training while they are in the military. It has been recognized that veterans, while highly trained and mature, are more inclined to have experience with applied coursework but are not always prepared for other facets of university education. This different style of educational experience can leave the veteran underprepared for some higher-level education courses. Colleges should make up the lack of skills to prepare the veteran for success in his or her program of choice (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Veterans' prior military experience and training prepared them for success in college by honing

their confidence in their abilities, creating a self-reliance in their own actions, and developing discipline in being responsible for their actions. They also acquire other skills in the military that are learned and ingrained daily and that are effective to the higher education learning environment. Skills such as goal orientation, time management, tolerance for high stress, and professionalism when working with instructors or facilitators assisting in their success (Norman et al., 2015).

Military veterans learn skills for success through their military training. According to Duckworth (2016) military training for the Green Beret's includes the motto, "Improvise, adapt, overcome" (p. 70). There is also the consideration of maturation of the individual, where the student develops a long-term passion and perseverance as the student ages. During training and through the culture of the military service members, the student develops maturity to be successful in the position. When separated from the military this can be a useful tool of grit to be successful at college. An individual student's "values, commitments, abilities, and prior academic preparation all play a part in their success" (Tinto, 2012, p. 8).

Military life has the potential to be valuable to veterans. Whether they spend their military time in peacetime or combat, there is a chance they have real-life experiences not encountered by the traditional student. These life-experiences can be a valuable source of knowledge for veterans. When instructors develop lessons to include high-impact programs they are often less relevant to veterans due to their real-life experiences. In addition student veterans are more likely to engage in preparing for classes compared to the nonveteran student (Kim & Cole, 2013).

Much of the literature covers stressful events that occur to veterans while in civilian postsecondary education. For example, according to De La Garza et al. (2016), along with

research regarding the Structural Equation Model, neither age nor number of stressful events correlates to academic success. While researching the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM), De Le Garza et al. suggest that high school GPA, self-efficacy interest, and other elements of their model reliably indicate the potential for postsecondary success at a community college.

Veterans often have a significant advantage over their traditional student counterparts and potentially other nontraditional students. Kim and Cole (2013) described that veterans are often more culturally sensitive to people unlike themselves. This sensitivity is due to their military experience. While spending time in military service, veterans are trained to engage with other individuals from various cultures and subcultures around the country. The expectation is that members of the military should perform together as a team, without negative implications due to cultural differences. Kim and Cole also pointed out that veterans are often assigned overseas and associate with other militaries or live in areas with unique non-American cultures. Veterans thereby adapt to working with these different cultures and can be more aware of cultural differences. Because of this cultural sensitivity veterans are also open to varying points of view as they have experienced while associating with other cultures. When the veterans are involved with college, they require less investment in noncore activities toward their academic pursuits which the traditional students should develop when they begin college. Veterans' stronger awareness and appreciation of cultures demonstrate the value that their out-of-class experiences foster and reinforce learning toward academic success (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010)

In another example of the benefits of veterans' worldly experiences, their maturity is emphasized in that what they have learned outside of college essentially is a benefit to their learning experiences (Kim & Cole, 2013). A nontraditional student generally will acquire

substantial gains in knowledge base while attending college. Comparatively, the veteran already has developed noncollege knowledge base while in the military, or just by their experiences since exiting high school. These experiences gained by veterans basically moderates the gains they will acquire while in higher education. This is not entirely a negative; instead it develops a stronger foundation of knowledge that the traditional students would still need to develop due to their reduced real-world experiences.

On the other hand, veteran students' academic success is influenced by participation in classes, preparing for classes, and taking part in activities on campus. Kim and Cole (2013) pointed out that veterans, unlike their nonveteran peers, are often more engaged in preparing for their classes. While at the same time they are earning a living so they can provide for their dependents. Considering they are often commuting to college, they need the extra funds to cover the costs of transportation. Because veterans are more likely than nonveterans to have families and spend time with activities involving caring for them or taking care of themselves, they are not able to spend a great deal of time with activities on campus. Kim and Cole suggested that veterans at risk of not completing their program of study would benefit by engaging in on campus activities. However veterans do not perceive these activities essential for meeting course requirements and are not likely to participate. Veterans often do not feel these activities fit their needs.

There are many options when attending a community college. There are often programs designed as development for career options or university preparation programs. Built within some programs are independent studies or self-designed majors. Kim and Cole (2013) discovered that veteran students were more likely than nonveteran students to participate in these programs. This allows for increased flexibility in classroom attendance, greater opportunities to

incorporate personal and military experience into the academic discourse, and for colleges to accept the maximum amount of academic credit from military experience. Veterans often have misconceptions that all their military credit will transfer into an academic program so they can earn a degree quickly. They are disappointed when they are informed by academic advisors that few or no credits will transfer towards their desired program of study. This emphasizes a need behind an effective orientation program at 2-year colleges. An orientation program for veterans can demonstrate clear support from campus leadership and, along with credit information, the colleges can provide academic, career, and financial advice avoiding the overwhelming feeling that occurs with new experiences (Heineman, 2016). Academic advisors are another source to provide information about credit transfer thereby helping veterans understand their needs toward program completion (Kirchner, 2015).

Community Colleges in Position to Assist Veterans

Because veteran students fit into the category of nontraditional students their ideal college or university is one that supports their needs. An effective higher education institution should provide a program of study the veteran student desires but should also provide services and conveniences to make their educational experience the best return on their investment in money and time leading to their success. Kim and Cole (2013) found that 84% of student veterans made the decision to initially attend 2-year colleges compared to 16% who attended 4-year universities. The attraction to the 2-year college is because the veteran is often involved with taking care of family, having a need to earn an income, and preferring to commute to school rather than living at a college or university.

Community colleges were designed over the years to be commuter colleges. Students live at home and commute to attend school. The design of a community college is geared towards serving nontraditional students, and thereby serving the veteran student population. Because of this, they are an attractive alternative for veterans making their transition back to civilian life (Runman et al., 2011). Even though community colleges were designed to accommodate nontraditional students, they also support students from nearly every age group; more often students who are 18 years old and older. Many students will spend their time in classes, and then leave compared to a 4-year university where many students spend nearly all their time on campus and participate in activities on campus. Because veteran students are generally nontraditional students, community colleges are well positioned for recruiting and attracting student veterans who want to earn their degree, often without having to spend an inordinate amount of time on campus. This creates an environment conducive to the veterans' transition back to the civilian environment after separating from military service, and at the same time attend college (Rumann et al., 2011).

Veterans' transition from military to civilian status can take time. Runman and Hamrick (2010) explained that it could take 6 months to 2 years for major transitions to occur. Veterans may be processing understanding of their military experience towards transition and at the same time negotiating personal identity changes while concentrating on academic studies. The 2 years they are pursuing a community college degree could also be time the colleges can be supporting these students and preparing them for transfer to a university for continued education or to the civilian workforce. With community colleges well positioned to support veteran students, they can assist these students in a successful transition to civilian life.

Social interactions are a factor in success at a community college and these interactions can assist in transition to the communities that veterans are living in after separation from the military. Kim and Cole (2013) argued that adapting to campus, such as a community college, along with the people they interact with, can have a great impact on veterans' abilities to progress in college as well as succeed in their studies. The authors also agreed that it can help them to reengage with the communities they may have left behind when they entered into the military. Griffin and Gilbert (2015) discussed that support through social interactions can provide caring, affirmation, provide positive feedback, and can assist veterans in their transition to civilian college. Veterans can then use these social interactions and academic engagements in their new college environment to develop a sense of purpose and self-awareness (Kirchner et al., 2014). The smaller environment of a community college could be more enticing to a veteran attempting to blend in with others or find opportunities for companionship with other nontraditional students.

Community colleges can develop assets to improve the success opportunities for veterans. By creating a veteran or adult friendly campus, this environment would have an increased influence toward academic success. Community colleges can develop processes such as priority registration to support veterans through academic and financial counselors. Norman et al. (2015) emphasized that there could be a visible presence such as providing a veteran specific location for gathering or studying or a veteran's club to contribute to veterans' opportunities to build camaraderie. They also pointed out that showing symbols of support for veterans such as military flags, emblems, or posters that show the military in a positive light will create a sense of belonging to veterans on the campus.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this quantitative study using comparative data was to compare the success factors (Grade Point Average (GPA), fall-to-fall retention, and graduation rates) of military veterans compared to the general student population at four participating community colleges. Veterans' transition from the highly-structured hierarchical culture of the military to community college can be challenging. Veteran student data were compared to similar data of students from the general student body to determine if there were any significance in the differences in the mean, number, and proportions of their academic characteristics. This research was a nonexperimental research design using quantitative methodology along with a comparative and correlational design. Secondary analysis consists of using data already existing in a database (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

This research consisted of statistical data from a cohort of military veterans and from the general student body. Data extracted were for students starting college in Fall 2013 and continuing for the next 3 consecutive years, or 150% of the anticipated time it takes to complete an associate degree. Data used in this research were student freshman grade point average (GPA), student age at enrollment, final GPA, number of semesters to graduation, student gender, fall-to-fall persistence rates, financial aid usage, and full-time attendance rates. Data were analyzed to determine if there were significant differences between military veterans and students from the general student body in regard to these student success indications.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

Research Question 1: For the fall 2013 semester is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.748, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho1: The fall 2013 GPA for students who are military veterans is not significantly different from 2.748.

Research Question 2: For the spring 2014 semester is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.632, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho2: The spring 2014 GPA for students who are military veterans is not significantly different from 2.632.

Research Question 3: For the fall 2014 semester is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.753, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho3: The fall 2014 GPA for students who are military veterans is not significantly different from 2.753.

Research Question 4: For the spring 2015 semester is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.819, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho4: The spring 2015 GPA for students who are military veterans is not significantly different from 2.819.

Research Question 5: Is the age at enrollment for students who are military veterans significantly different from 21.37, the mean age for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho5: The mean age at enrollment for students who are military veterans is not significantly different from 21.37.

Research Question 6: Is the proportion of military veterans who graduate in 3 years significantly different from the proportion of students in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho6: The proportion of military veterans who graduate in three years are not significantly different from the proportion of students in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

Research Question 7: Is the proportion of military veterans who are male significantly different from the proportion of students who are male in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho7: The proportion of military veterans who are male are not significantly different from the proportion of students who are male in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

Research Question 8: Is the proportion of military veterans who are female significantly different from the proportion of students who are female in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho8: The proportion of military veterans who are female are not significantly different from the proportion of students who are female in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

Research Question 9: Is the proportion of military veterans who persist first year fall-to-fall significantly different from the proportion of students who persist first year in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho9: The proportion of military veterans who persist first year fall-to-fall is not significantly different from the proportion of students who persist first year in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

Research Question 10: Is the proportion of military veterans who are on financial aid, excluding GI Bill, significantly different from the proportion of students who are on financial aid in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho10: The proportion of military veterans who are on financial aid, excluding GI Bill, is not significantly different from the proportion of students who are on financial aid in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

Research Question 11: Is the proportion of military veterans who attend college full-time for fall 2013, significantly different from the proportion of students in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho11: The proportion of military veterans who attend college full-time for fall 2013, are not significantly different from the proportion of students in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

Instrumentation

Data were accessed through the archival data system of Student Information System (SIS) that maintains all student level data that is tracked at each community college institutional research office at the four participating community colleges. The information consisted of all

identified students who began their first semester at the community college during the fall 2013 term and continued with this indicated cohort until ending summer 2016 term. The cohort consisted of identified veterans and they were compared to the general student population.

Population and Sample

The population of this research consisted of all identified military veterans as well as the population of general student population at the four participating community colleges in Tennessee starting during the 2013 cohort. Student veterans were identified at the community college and determined to have served in the United States Armed Forces inclusive of Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. The purposeful sample consisted of a cohort of identified veteran students starting in the 2013 academic year and continuing for a 3-consecutive year period or 150% of the normal time it takes to complete an associate degree. The cohort consists of 40 veteran students, tracking them for the 3-year period to determine how many persisted to program completion or dropped out of college. The variables for veterans within this cohort were compared to the variables for students in the general student body. Differences between the groups were highlighted.

Members of this population have served in the United State Armed Forces. These military veteran students are making a transition from the military culture to the civilian college culture. The characteristics are varied but the entire population is accustomed to a highly structured hierarchical culture (Heineman, (2016).

Data Collection

The data were requested from the research office at Tennessee Higher Education Commission. The sample consisted of students from four middle Tennessee Community colleges consisting of a cohort starting fall semester of 2013. The number of the sample, 40 students, was sufficient to develop statistical calculations for each of the research questions provided. This data were from historical data maintained through the Student Information System provided by the four participating community colleges. In consideration of the protection of the students involved with this study, the research office removed all personal identifying data from the research items. Names, community college student identification numbers, and social security numbers were removed to ensure the researcher was unable to determine any personal identifiable information.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The data were analyzed using a series of single-sample t-tests to address Research Questions 1 through 5 that compared the veteran population with the general student body. Research Questions 6 through 11 were evaluated using a series of chi-square analysis. Two-way contingency table analyses were conducted for these research questions to determine differences of the proportion of the veteran population compared to the general student population. All data were analyzed at the .05 level of significance.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to compare the success factors (GPA, fall-to-fall retention, and graduation rates) of military veterans to the general student population at four participating community colleges. In addition the researcher investigated other comparisons with the general student population such as age, gender, use of financial aid, and attendance per semester.

The researcher operationalized student success through evaluating student GPA, fall-to-fall retention, and students graduating from their chosen program of study. The other factors were investigated to determine if military veterans' performance was significantly different from the general student populations at the four institutions.

This researcher used a nonexperimental research design using quantitative methodology along with a comparative and correlational design. The researcher used data extracted from student level data from four community colleges in Middle Tennessee. The target population was first-time freshman, military veteran students comparing them with the general student population of first-time freshman starting during the same cohort of fall 2013. The semesters reviewed are Fall 2013, Spring 2014, Summer 2014, Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Summer 2015, Fall 2015, Spring 2016, and Summer 2016. The military veteran population consisted of 40 students in comparison to the 5,189 of the general student population. Each of these students was pursuing an associate degree and was enrolled at one of the four Middle Tennessee community colleges.

Eleven research questions guided this study and 11 null hypotheses were tested. A single-sample t-test was conducted to analyze the data associated with Research Questions 1 through 5.

A chi-square (χ^2) test of independence (two-way contingency table analysis) was conducted to analyze the data associated with research question 6 through 11.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

For the fall 2013 semester is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.748, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho1: The fall 2013 GPA for students who are military veterans is not significantly different from 2.748.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted on the fall 2013 GPAs for freshman military veteran to evaluate whether their mean GPA was significantly different from 2.748, the mean GPA for the general freshman student population at the four participating community colleges. The sample mean of 2.561 (SD = 1.09) was not significantly different from 2.748, $t(31) = -.97$, $p = .342$. Therefore, Ho1 was not rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the mean differences in GPAs between the two groups ranged from $-.58$ to $.21$. The effect size *d* of $.35$ indicated a small effect. The results support the conclusion that there is not a significant difference in the mean freshman GPA between military veterans and the general student population at the four participating community colleges. The veterans mean GPA was lower than the general student population. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the two groups.

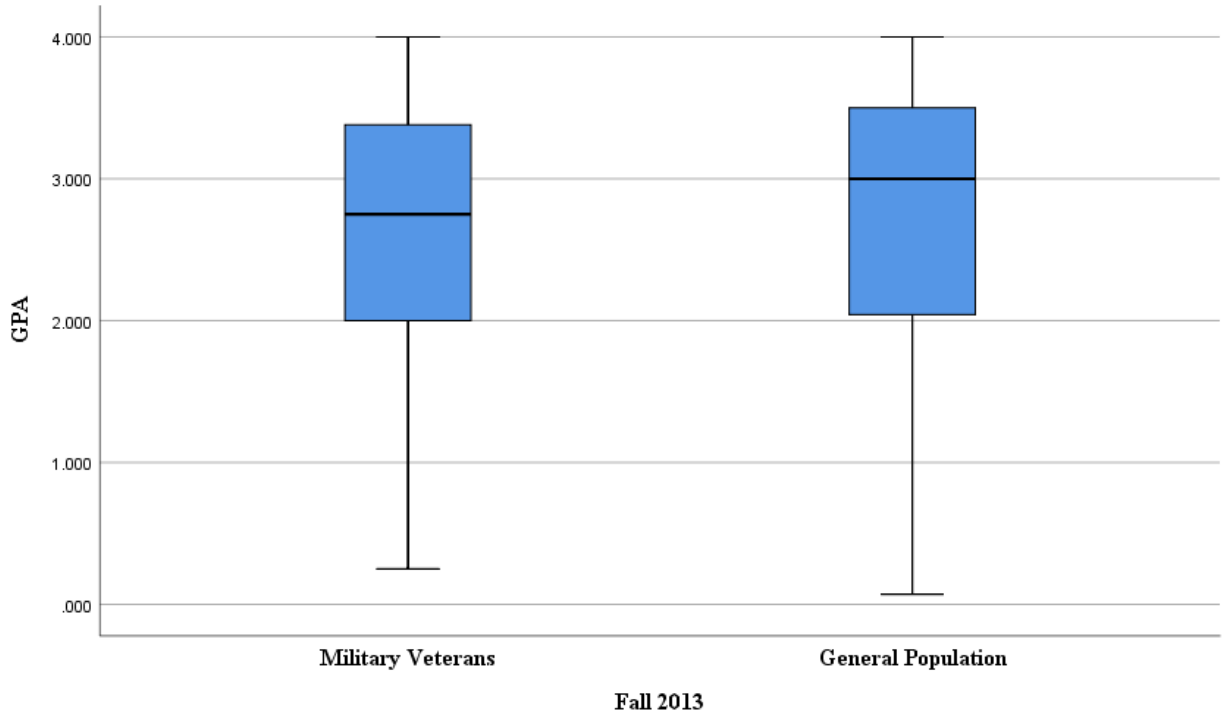


Figure 1. Boxplot of cumulative freshman GPA fall 2013

Research Question 2

For the spring 2014 semester is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.632, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho2: The spring 2014 GPA for students who are military veterans is not significantly different from 2.632.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted on the spring 2014 GPAs for freshman military veteran to evaluate whether their mean GPA was significantly different from 2.632, the mean GPA for the general freshman student population at the four participating community colleges. The sample mean of 2.356 (SD = .91) was not significantly different from 2.632, $t(23) = -1.49$, $p = .150$. Therefore, Ho2 was not rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the mean differences

in GPAs between the two groups ranged from $-.66$ to $.11$. The effect size d of $.30$ indicated a small effect. The results support the conclusion that there is not a significant difference in the mean freshman GPA between military veterans and the general student population at the four participating community colleges. The veterans mean GPA was lower than the general student population. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the two groups.

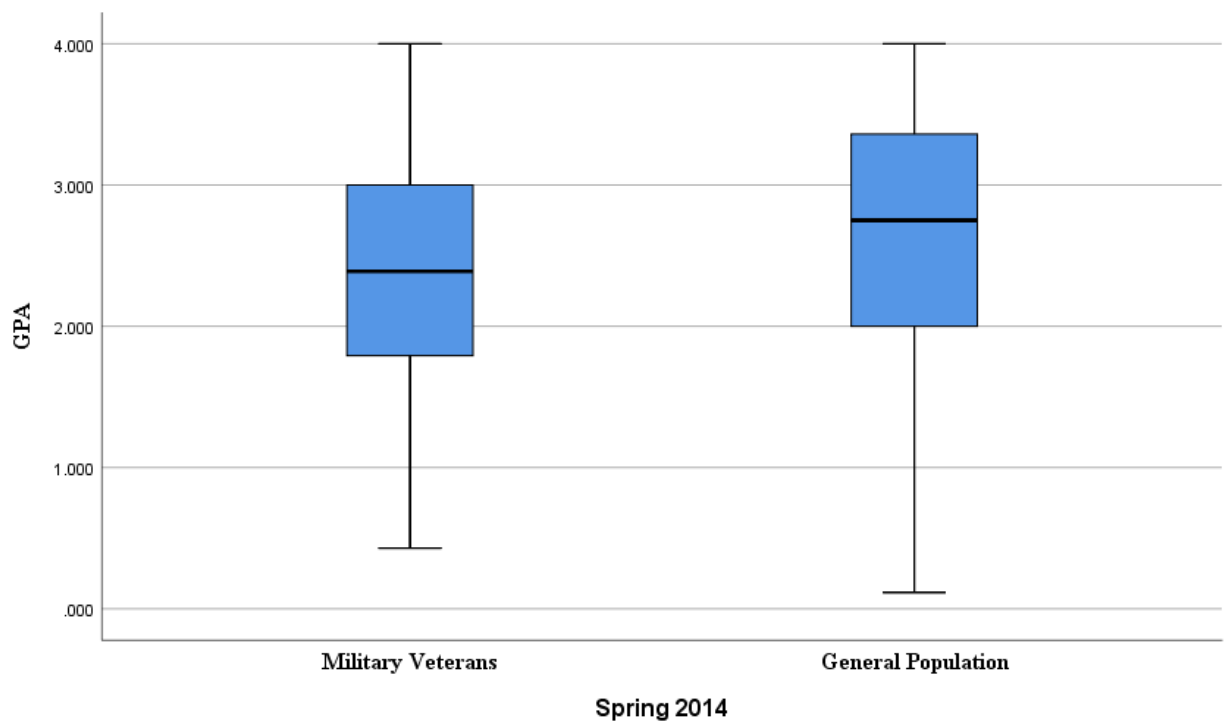


Figure 2. Boxplot of cumulative freshman GPA spring 2014

Research Question 3

For the fall 2014 semester is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.753, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho3: The fall 2014 GPA for students who are military veterans is not significantly different from 2.753.

A one-sample t test was conducted on the fall 2014 GPAs for freshman military veteran to evaluate whether their mean GPA was significantly different from 2.753, the mean GPA for the general freshman student population at the four participating community colleges. The sample mean of 2.520 (SD = 0.87) was not significantly different from 2.753, $t(14) = -1.04$, $p = .315$. Therefore, Ho3 was not rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the mean differences in GPAs between the two groups ranged from $-.71$ to $.25$. The effect size d of $.33$ indicated a small effect. The results support the conclusion that there is not a significant difference in the mean freshman GPA between military veterans and the general student population at the four participating community colleges. The veterans mean GPA was lower than the general student population. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the two groups.

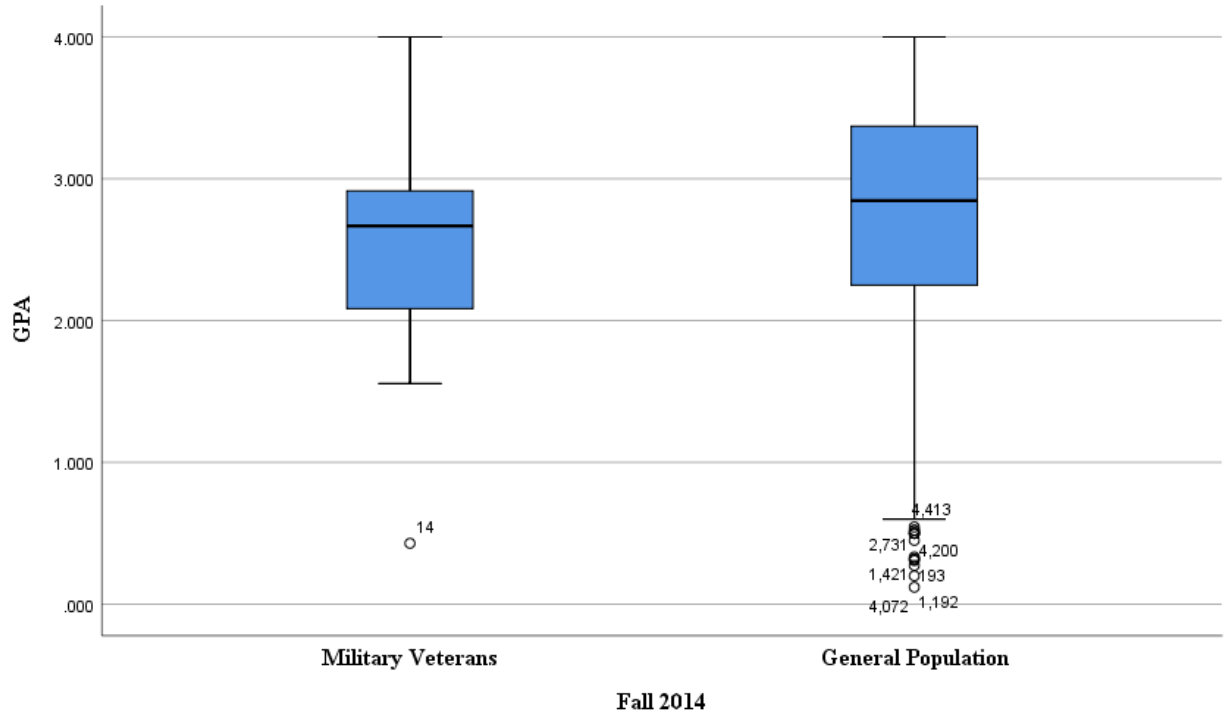


Figure 3. Boxplot of cumulative GPA fall 2014

Research Question 4

For the spring 2015 semester is the GPA for students who are military veterans significantly different from 2.819, the mean GPA for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho4: The spring 2015 GPA for students who are military veterans is not significantly different from 2.819.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted on the spring 2015 GPAs for freshman military veteran to evaluate whether their mean GPA was significantly different from 2.819, the mean GPA for the general freshman student population at the four participating community colleges. The sample mean of 2.545 (SD = .88) was not significantly different from 2.819, $t(10) = -1.04$,

$p = .324$. Therefore, H_0 was not rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the mean differences in GPAs between the two groups ranged from $-.87$ to $.32$. The effect size d of $.33$ indicated a small effect. The results support the conclusion that there is not a significant difference in the mean freshman GPA between military veterans and the general student population at the four participating community colleges. The veterans mean GPA was lower than the general student population. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the two groups.

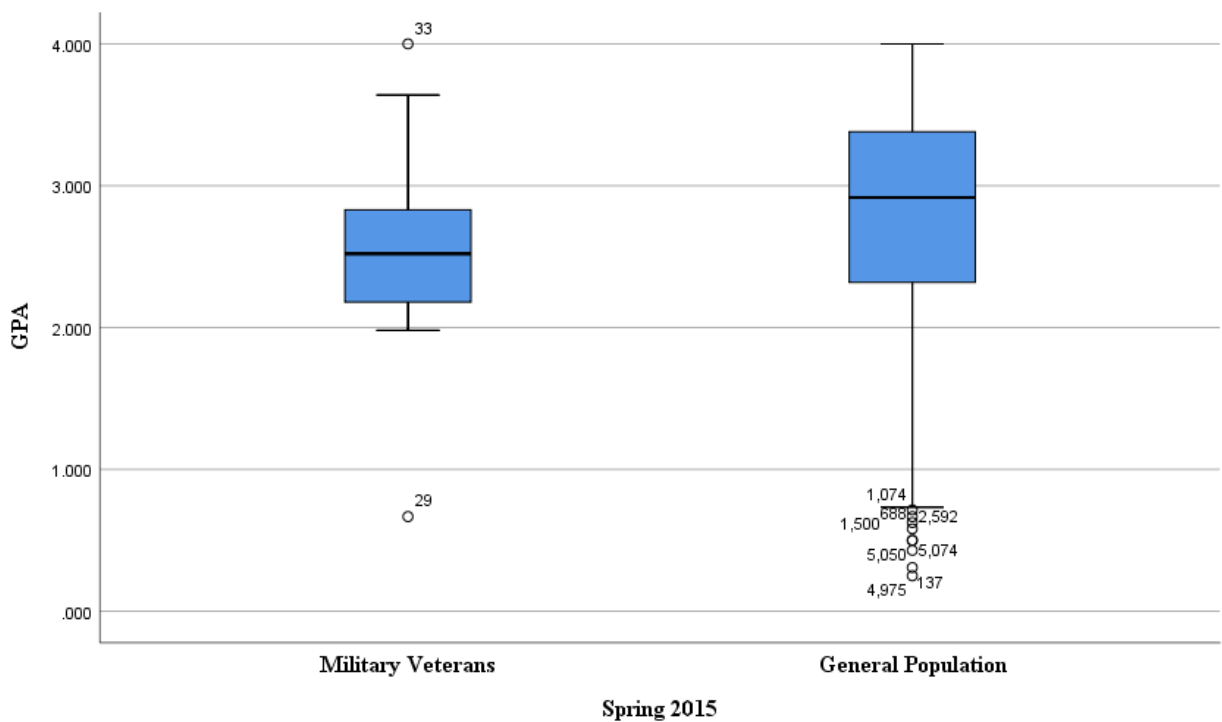


Figure 4. Boxplot of cumulative GPA spring 2015

Research Question 5

Is the age at enrollment for students who are military veterans significantly different from 21.37, the mean age for the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho5: The mean age at enrollment for students who are military veterans is not significantly different from 21.37.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted on the age category to evaluate whether their mean age was significantly different from 21.37, the mean age for the general student population at the four participating community colleges. The sample mean of 22.98 (SD = 7.38) was not significantly different from 21.37, $t(39) = 1.38, p = .607$. Therefore, Ho6 was not rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the mean differences in age category between the two groups ranged from -1.75 to 2.96. The effect size *d* of .22 indicates a small effect. Figure 2 displays a boxplot of the distribution of age. The results support the conclusion that there is not a significant difference in the mean age difference between military veterans and the general student population at the four participating colleges. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The mean age of the military veterans was older but not significantly older than the general student population. Figure 5 shows the distribution of the two groups.

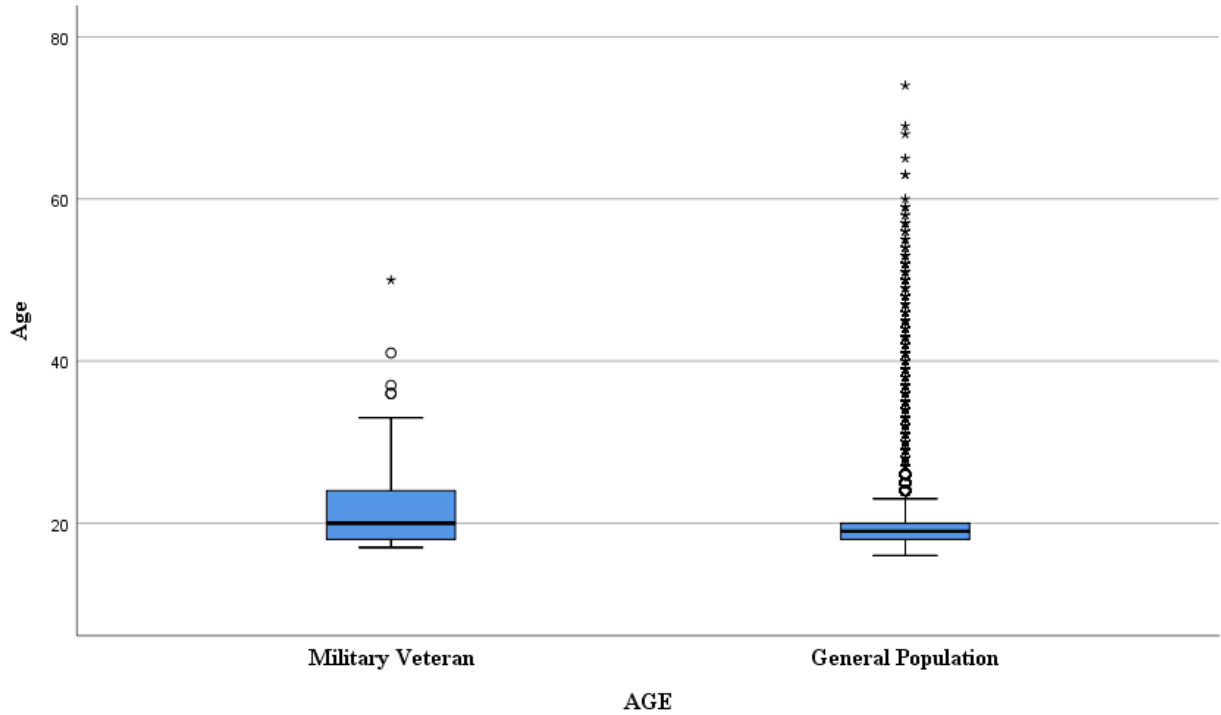


Figure 5. Boxplot of age of students

Research Question 6

Is the proportion of military veterans who graduate in 3 years significantly different from the proportion of students in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho6: The proportion of military veterans who graduate in 3 years are not significantly different from the proportion of students in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in the proportion of military veterans who graduate in 3 years from the proportion of students in the general student population at four participating community colleges.

The two variables were military veterans and general student population graduations in 3 years. Graduations were found to be not significantly different Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 5229) = 3.70, p = .054$, Cramer's V = .03. The proportion of military veterans who graduated in 3 years is .08 compared to .20 for general student population. Veterans' graduation rates were not significantly different from the general student population graduation rates however the rates were close to indicating significance. Table 1 presents the number of students earning their first associate degree during the 3 years of this cohort.

Table 1

Count of Students Earning an Associate Degree

| Type of Student | Degree Earned | | Total |
|----------------------------|------------------|-----------|-------|
| | Associate Degree | No Degree | |
| Veteran | 3 | 37 | 40 |
| General Student Population | 1,017 | 4,172 | 5,189 |

Research Question 7

Is the proportion of military veterans who are male significantly different from the proportion of students who are male in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho7: The proportion of military veterans who are male are not significantly different from the proportion of students who are male in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in the proportion of male military veterans than the proportion of students

in the general student population at four participating community colleges. The two variables were male military veterans and general student population were found to be significantly different Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 5229) = 10.57, p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .05$. The proportion of males in the veteran population was .675 compared to .420. (the proportion of males in the general student population). The proportion of military veteran students who were male was significantly higher than the proportion of males in the general student population. Table 2 indicates the proportion of male students attending the four participating community colleges.

Table 2

Proportion of Male Military Veterans Compared to General Student Population

| Type of Student | Male | |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| | Military Veteran | General Student Population |
| N | 27 | 2,180 |
| Proportion | .675 | .420 |

Research Question 8

Is the proportion of military veterans who are female significantly different from the proportion of students who are female in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho8: The proportion of military veterans who are female are not significantly different from the proportion of students who are female in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in the proportion of male military veterans than the proportion of students

in the general student population at four participating community colleges. The two variables were female military veterans and general student population were found to be significantly different Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 5229) = 10.57, p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .05$. The proportion of females in the veteran population is .325 compared to .580. (the proportion of females in the general student population). The proportion of military veteran students who was female were significantly lower than the proportion of females in the general student population. Table 3 indicates the proportion of female students attending the four participating community colleges.

Table 3

Proportion of Female Military Veterans Compared to General Student Population

| Type of Student | Female | |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| | Military Veteran | General Student Population |
| N | 13 | 3,009 |
| Proportion | .325 | .580 |

Research Question 9

Is the proportion of military veterans who persist first year fall-to-fall significantly different from the proportion of students who persist first year in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho9: The proportion of military veterans who persist first year fall-to-fall is not significantly different from the proportion of students who persist first year in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in the proportion of military veterans who persisted fall-to-fall than the

proportion of students in the general student population at four participating community colleges. The two variables were military veterans and general student population were not significantly different Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 5229) = 3.754, p = .053$, Cramer's $V = .053$. The proportion of military veterans who persisted fall-to-fall was .35 compared to .50 for the general student population. Veterans' fall-to-fall persistence were not significantly different from the general student population fall-to-fall persistence however the persistence rates were close to indicating significance. Table 4 indicates the frequency of students that persisted fall-to-fall the first year of the cohort.

Table 4

Academic Year 2013 to 2014 Fall-to-Fall Persistence

| Type of Student | Persistence Fall Academic Year 2014 | | Total |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|-------|
| | Persist | Not-Attending | |
| Veteran | 14 | 26 | 40 |
| General Student Population | 2,614 | 2,575 | 5,189 |

Research Question 10

Is the proportion of military veterans who are on financial aid, excluding GI Bill, significantly different from the proportion of students who are on financial aid in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho10: The proportion of military veterans who are on financial aid, excluding GI bill is not significantly different from the proportion of students who are on financial aid in the general student population at the four participating community colleges

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in the proportion of military veterans who are on financial aid than the proportion of students in the general student population at four participating community colleges. The two variables were military veterans and general student population on financial aid were found to be significantly different Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 5229) = 6.20, p = .013$, Cramer's $V = .03$. The proportion of military veterans using financial aid was .55 compared to .64 of the general student population. The proportion of military veteran students who are on financial aid were significantly lower than the proportion of students using financial aid in the general student population. Table 5 indicates the number of students using Financial Aid compared to those not using Financial Aid during the cohort.

Table 5

Comparison of Students Using Financial Aid-All Financial Aid Combined

| Type of Student | Financial Aid Use | | Total |
|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------|
| | Financial Aid | No Financial Aid | |
| Veteran | 18 | 22 | 40 |
| General Student Population | 3,320 | 1,868 | 5,188 |

Note. All Financial Aid was combined, excluding GI Bill

Research Question 11

Is the proportion of military veterans who attend college full-time for fall 2013, significantly different from the proportion of students in the general student population at the four participating community colleges?

Ho11: The proportion of military veterans who attend college full-time for fall 2013 are not significantly different from the proportion of students in the general student population at the four participating community colleges.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in the proportion of military veterans from the proportion of students in the general student population who attended college full time at four participating community colleges. The two variables were military veterans and general student population who attended college full time during fall 2013 were not significantly different Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 4,424) = 3.608, p = .058$, Cramer's V = .029. The proportion of veteran students' attendance is .32 compared to .49 of the general student population. Veterans' full-time attendance the first semester were not significantly different than the general student population full-time attendance rate, however the rates were close to indicating significance. Table 6 indicates the number of students attending either Full time or Part time during the cohort.

Table 6

Comparison of Student Cohort Attendance

| Type of Student | Attendance Type | | Total |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-------|
| | Full Time | Part Time | |
| Veteran | 10 | 21 | 31 |
| General Student Population | 2,169 | 2,224 | 4,393 |

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this comparative quantitative study was to compare the success factors of military veterans to the general student population at four participating community colleges. The researcher compared various variables used to measure student success. Cumulative GPA over the first four terms, graduation rate within 3 years or 150% of the time it takes to earn an associate degree, fall-to-fall persistence, and whether students were attending school full time during their first term were included. Other factors taken into consideration were age, gender, and whether students were using financial aid while attending college. The variables were considered to determine if there were any areas that were significantly different between veterans and general student population. To determine whether veterans were as successful as the general student population was determined by comparing veteran students to the general student population in these areas.

This study involved the population of students at four public community colleges in the middle Tennessee region. Each of these colleges is under the governance of the Tennessee Board of Regents. This single governing board creates some consistency in the associate degrees offered at the four community colleges. Each of the students in the study was pursuing an associate degree at one of the participating community colleges. All the students selected to be included in the study were classified as first-time freshman. Overall there were 5,229 students in the population. The selected cohort started in the fall of 2013 and the data continued through summer of 2016, or 150% of time to earn an associate degree. Forty students were classified as veterans, and 5,189 students not identified as veterans were considered the general student

population. When examining the students, the population of veterans were examined separately so as not to influence calculations regarding the general student population.

This study involved analysis of data indicative to veterans' and general population students' success and demographics characteristics for comparison. One-sample t-tests were conducted for Research Questions 1 through 5. Chi-square (χ^2) tests of independence (two-way contingency table analysis) was used to analyze the data relevant to Research Questions 6 through 11.

Summary of the Findings

After evaluating the 11 research questions, there were three findings where veterans were considered significantly different from the general student population at the four participating community colleges. The proportion of male military veterans was determined to be higher than the proportion of males in the general student population, and the proportion of female military veterans were determined to be lower than the proportion of females in the general student population. The use of financial aid excluding GI Bill was determined to be lower by veterans than the general student population. The other variables were determined not to be significantly different between the veterans and the general student population.

When evaluating freshman GPA for fall 2013 of this cohort with Research Question 1, referencing the general student population compared to the student veterans, there was not a significant difference between these two groups. However the mean freshman GPA of veterans of 2.56 was lower than the mean GPA of 2.75 of the general student population.

For students who persisted to the spring 2014 term, as examined in Research Question 2, the disparity between the military veteran student and the general student population was similar.

During the spring 2014 term military veterans had a mean GPA of 2.36, a drop of .21 from the fall 2013 semester. At the same time, the general student population GPA dropped .17 to 2.63. The difference between the two groups was .28. In the spring semester both groups experienced a drop in their cumulative GPA. However the two groups were not significantly different.

Continuing to the fall 2014 semester, Research Question 3 showed that there was not a significant difference between the two groups. During this term the GPA for the general student population was 2.75 compared to the military veterans 2.52. In this case the general student population GPA increased by .12 and the military veterans increased by .16. The difference between the two GPAs was .23. During the fall 2014 semester the difference between the two groups decreased.

For the spring 2015 semester in Research Question 4, the GPAs for both groups increased. However there was no significance difference between the two groups. The general student population GPA was 2.82, an increase of .07. The military veteran GPA increased to 2.55, an increase of .03. the difference between the two groups was .27. This gap increased by .04 from previous semesters.

In Research Question 5 the independent variable of age was evaluated. Veterans are generally found to be older than the traditional students because of starting later after high school (Kim & Cole, 2013). Veterans' ages were not significantly different from the general student population in the present study. The mean age of the general student population was 21.37 compared to the veterans' age was 22.98. The difference of 1.61 years was not considered significant. The similar mean age between the two groups could also point to similarities between other variables within this study.

A clear indicator of academic success is the graduation of students. Within this study, the graduation rates of the two groups were not significantly different. Considering the small number of students who graduated within 3 years leaves this section questionable. Only three military veteran students graduated within the 3-year period of this cohort for 7.5% of the sample, compared to 1,017 of the general student population for 19.6% of this population. The statistical measurement still shows that these two groups were not significantly different. The issues for why there was such a low graduation rate within the 3 years are not covered within this study with the available data. This could be due to students stopping out, transferring to another institution, or the timeframe of 150% for this study was not sufficient to cover all the possible graduations from this cohort.

Research Question 7 determined if there was a significant difference between the proportion of male veterans compared to the general student population in this cohort. When analyzed, it was determined that there was a significant difference in the proportion of male veterans and the general student population. With p value less than .001, it indicates that the proportion of military veteran males was significantly larger than the proportion of males in the general student population. The general student population was 42% male, compared to the veteran sample was 68% male. The reason for the significance of the proportions of military veteran males and females in college is that there are generally a much larger proportion of males serving in the military compared to the proportion of females serving in the military.

Research Question 8 was designed to determine if there was a significant difference between the proportion of female veterans and the general student population. It was determined there was a significant difference in the proportion of female veterans in the veteran population compared to the general student population. In this cohort 58% of the general student population

were females and 33% of veterans were female. There are generally fewer females than males serving in the military.

For students to be successful in college, they must continue their attendance until they have completed their degree, otherwise known as persistence. However in Research Question 9, it was determined that the difference in persistence between the two groups was not significantly different. Of note is that 50.4% of the general student population persisted fall-to-fall the first year compared to 35% of the student veterans' sample. There was a lower percentage of veterans not persisting.

Financial aid enhances the opportunities for student to be able to afford to attend higher education. When evaluating the two groups for all forms of financial aid, excluding the GI Bill, in Research Question 10, veterans were noticed to be using financial aid substantially less than the general student population. The military veterans were determined to be significantly different from the general student population at the four participating community colleges. Using just available data, veterans used combined financial aid at a rate of 45% compared to 64% of the general student population. What is not available are data for tracking the usage of veterans' GI Bill and other military financial benefits such as federal military tuition assistance. Because of the current tracking system within Tennessee community colleges, accurate GI Bill data is not available. It's difficult to determine if the GI Bill would have a positive or negative effect on this calculation. However the results could potentially be an indicator that veterans' persistence may be affected by a lower usage of Pell Grants and state financial aid if their only source of financial aid is from federal or state benefits or no benefits at all.

Research question 11 considered full-time versus part-time attendance by both groups during the fall semester of 2013. For the two groups there was not a significant difference for

full-time attendance. Full-time attendance was calculated as anyone attending 12 credit hours or more per semester. All other attendance was less than 12 credit hours. If any students did not attend during the semester they were not taken into consideration.

For students attending the fall 2013 semester, 49% of the general student population attended full time and 32% of the military veteran students attended full time. This indicated that student veterans were more likely to attend part time than the general student population. Part-time attendance creates two considerations. One, veterans are going to take longer to complete their degree than the general student population. Second, part-time attendance potentially leads to students stopping attendance before completing their program of study. Either way this could be an indicator that 3 years may not be enough time to determine academic success of any of the students, and in particular the military veterans.

With this study of the full- time and part-time attendance, it was interesting to note the full-time attendance by military veteran students. Over the 3-year period of data, it was noted that of all the military veteran students in the study, there were only 19 times that these students attended full-time. Of these 19 times, the full-time attendance was during the first, second, and fourth terms of the cohort. During the first semester, 10 military veteran students attended full time. During semester two of the cohort, only seven students attended full time. Finally on the fourth semester of the cohort, only two military veteran students attended full time. The remaining semesters all of the military veteran students attended part time each semester, lengthening the time it will take for them to graduate with an associate degree.

Conclusions

The results of this study demonstrated little significant difference between veteran students and general student population. Student veterans used federal and state financial aid less than the general student population. This lack of significance may be for multiple reasons and could be influenced by confounding variables. The most positive reason for the lack of significant difference could be from the optimal support from the staff and faculty at the colleges that were reviewed. These schools may be successful in promoting the success of all adults attending their institutions. With the data provided, it is difficult to determine the overall influence of the staff and faculty towards student success. Schools may be successful in implementing orientation programs, supporting veterans through Veterans Centers, or provide adequate support systems to enhance student's academic success.

The finding from the present study is that veterans are generally not significantly different in their academic performance. Analyses lead to this conclusion, but this could be because the chosen sample of the four middle Tennessee community colleges. With an expansion of this study, it could lead to a different conclusion. The timeframe of the present study could be an influence on the results. This study was limited to 3 years, or 150% of the time it takes to graduate with an associate degree. Attending college part time extends the time it takes to complete a degree. Three years may not be enough to complete an associate degree for some students, especially if veterans have other circumstances slowing their progress towards completing a degree.

Because the mean ages between the military veterans and general student population examined in this study both fit into the traditional student population of younger than 24, this could be a confounding characteristic influencing the study relating veterans to adult

characteristics. The present study does not take into consideration the veterans' military experience. Therefore it does not provide a means to determine if this characteristic would affect success. This characteristic was not tracked in the present study.

Veterans as adult student may have concerns with taking care of their family, working, or lack of financial resources while attempting to earn a college degree. Military veterans and adults must prioritize these factors along with academic progress. They must balance family, work, and school obligations (Clotfelter et al., 2013).

There are judgements that can be made from the research and data available during the present research. The primary lesson to be learned is that veterans are still an under-studied population of adult learners in community colleges. As stated previously, with an administrator's understanding of a student population he or she has a potential for setting up the group for success with adequate and appropriate supports.

Results from studies involving veterans produced inconsistent results. An example is that the use of financial aid should be available to assist students. However Williams (2015) pointed out the use of veterans' affairs benefits or another form of financial aid sometimes created negative financial effects for the military veteran. This seems counterintuitive to the intent of these benefits for veterans. The present study did not include to the Department of Veterans Affairs benefits, such as GI Bill, to determine its effects on military veterans' success. Military veterans have been emphasized by governing bodies within different states, but the research into this population has been limited, and the emphasis on their needs has only been a serious focus over the last few years.

A decrease in full-time attendance by military veterans during this cohort was documented. There are some assumptions that can be made to clarify this occurrence. Many

military veteran students fit into the category of an adult student and they have life interactions that influenced them to remain at part time while attending college. As Swett and Culp (2014) identified, adults are more likely to attend part time. Without direct interaction with these students to ask them why they reduced their attendance to part-time, it's difficult to answer this question.

To be able to accurately identify and evaluate student veteran supports at an institution of higher education, the population of military veterans needs to be clearly identified. While researching this subject of the success of military veteran students, an issue that became apparent was the lack of accurate tracking of the military veteran student population. Often veterans are not identified through the admissions process. The application process does not clearly identify veterans. If veterans are not identified early in their college career they are often overlooked throughout their time in college.

Previous research is often unclear as to the consistent academic performance for veteran students. In research identified in the literature review, the veterans were identified as “Damn average raisers” (Olson, 1973, p. 605), indicating that veterans were more successful than the general student population. However the present study did not support this finding. When reviewing the research questions for GPA, there is no clear linkage to the veterans having a higher GPA. Therefore, gathering of data from multiple institutions across the state has the challenge of consistent data. This data could have indications of misidentifying military veterans.

If each institution gathers consistent data, it will increase chances of determining accurate factors for military veterans' success. When considering veteran data, it may be necessary to view their performance from primary data sources if available. Such sources as ACT scores, high school GPA, or academic placement assessments could be used as a comparison to the same

students' final performance indicators as they complete their program of study. De La Garza et al. (2016) pointed out that high school GPA, self-efficacy, and an intrinsic interest in education are indicators of success. The availability of these resources was minimal and could not be used to effectively evaluate these variables. However as the data were being reviewed, it was noticed through conjecture that veterans seemed to start at a lower GPA level than the general student population. As they progressed through their program they seemed to gain momentum to close the gap between the two groups. By extending the view of the data beyond the 150%, it may be possible to determine if military veterans are able to close the gap in GPA. Considering veterans and adult students often attend part time, it may be necessary to extend research beyond the 150% marker to encompass the extended time it may take for these populations to complete their degree. Completion of 60 credit hours is challenging within 3 years when a student attends part time.

Veterans may be eligible for the GI Bill and other financial aid such as the Pell grant. Evans et al. (2015) posited that an orientation program could help students with the processes such as financial aid resources. The GI Bill provided the financial resources for veterans to obtain education or training (Mitchell, 2015). The present study did not have data on the GI Bill usage. Veterans had a lower use of Federal Financial Aid. An orientation may increase the military veterans' opportunity of using financial resources.

Veterans may have stopped attending when they achieved a certificate versus continuing until they completed an associate degree. Swett and Culp (2014) pointed out that adults are more likely to earn a certificate than to pursue an associate degree. Achieving a certificate would still indicate success. Some of these factors can be indicators of veteran student success but were not included within the comparisons of the present study.

Recommendations for Practice

As a result of this research the following recommendations for practice are presented:

1. Create a more effective system for identifying and tracking military veterans enrolled in Tennessee community colleges.
2. Create a training program for faculty and staff to understand military veteran students' transition to college.
3. Implement support systems at Tennessee community colleges to match the unique needs of military veteran students to provide supports that emphasize persistence to graduation.
5. Implement orientation programs specifically adapted to military veterans' needs. The orientation should include the process for accessing financial aid resources while attending community college.

Recommendations for Further Research

As a result of this research the following recommendations for research are presented:

1. Further research through qualitative measures has the potential of examining student veterans' mindset in success in college, thereby determining their needs while attending college.
2. A longitudinal study is needed to determine the long-term success of military veterans.
3. Conduct an expanded quantitative study of all public community colleges, universities, and Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology in the state of Tennessee.
4. Conduct an expanded study of the transfer of military veteran students to other colleges or 4-year universities.

5. Survey all Tennessee public community colleges about policies referencing military veterans; and,
6. A study of military veterans comparing application of prior learning assessment for military service credit and the rates of completion of their academic program of study is recommended.

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