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UNDERSTANDING THE PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION
AMONG ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE FACE OF
DEPLOYMENT, USING THE LENS OF SCHLOSSBERG'S TRANSITION THEORY

by

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A DISSERTATION

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Under the Supervision of Professor James V. Griesen

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University of Nebraska, 2014

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The purpose of this research study was to identify gaps in understanding of the specialized educational needs of active-duty military service members enrolled in higher education and to develop new insights that may be helpful to colleges and universities in designing initiatives, strategic plans, and resources to address these needs most effectively. In addition to the many recent intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and support missions and operations abroad, U.S. involvement in peacekeeping operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has resulted in significantly increased deployments of active-duty students. In existing literature, the impacts of deployment—specifically, effects of war-zone experiences such as post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries—have received much attention. Military educational benefits and educational challenges in transitioning to civilian life have also been researched and well documented. However, there has been little research surrounding the impacts of deployment on military personnel enrolled in higher education.

Aligning a more informed understanding of these impacts with Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1984)—which facilitates understanding of issues

affecting adults in transition—and Tinto’s Framework for Institutional Action for Student Success (Tinto, 2012) will benefit these students as well as colleges and universities by encouraging the development and design of initiatives and policies addressing these issues.

Using a purposeful sample, I interviewed 10 individuals who had experienced deployment while enrolled in higher education. From the data analysis, four primary themes concerning the unique challenges and responsibilities of active-duty military students while on deployment emerged: (a) challenges to higher education, (b) Internet-related challenges to completing coursework, (c) challenges to focus and concentration, and (d) proactiveness and responsibility of service members. Aligned with the theme-related findings and theoretical frameworks, this research study provides recommendations for practice in the areas of professional development, academic advising, student-faculty relationship, and distant education programs and online classes. Additionally, this study provides recommendations for future research.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Throughout history, universities have challenged the intelligence, understanding, and character of individuals, providing the opportunity to learn as well as reinforce and perhaps question long-held beliefs and values. Written in the 1800s, John H. Newman's essay, "The Idea of a University. I. What Is a University?" articulates the idea that universities provide educational opportunities to students while nurturing and developing their intellectual and personal growth. Newman eloquently describes a university as:

... the place to which a thousand schools make contributions; in which the intellect may safely range and speculate, sure to find its equal in some antagonist activity, and its judge in the tribunal of truth. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge. It is the place where the professor becomes eloquent, and is a missionary and a preacher, displaying his science in its most complete and most winning form, pouring it forth with the zeal of enthusiasm, and lighting up his own love of it in the breasts of his hearers. . . . It is a place which wins the admiration of the young by its celebrity, kindles the affections of the middle-aged by its beauty, and rivets the fidelity of the old by its associations. It is a seat of wisdom, a light of the world, a minister of the faith, an Alma Mater of the rising generation. It is this and a great deal more. . . . (Newman, 1852, para. 11)

In the U.S., universities are time-honored institutions and often reflect Newman's words. The Truman Commission capitalized on Newman's ideas in *Higher Education for American Democracy: A Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education*. Also known as the *Truman Commission Report*, this report published in 1947 is another articulate and powerfully expressive document that identifies the value of higher education in the U.S. (Sullivan, 2010). The report is significant to the mission and character of higher education and recognizes the importance of democracy in the U.S.

The framework of democracy grants all individuals the right to access education—and, although the *Truman Commission Report* was written more than 60 years ago, it demonstrates that the value of higher education in a free society remains significant into the 21st century:

No society can long remain free unless its members are freemen, and men are not free where ignorance prevails. . . . Education that liberates and ennobles must be made equally available to all. Justice to the individual demands this; the safety and progress of the Nation depend upon it. America cannot afford to let any of its potential human resources go undiscovered and undeveloped. (*Higher Education for American Democracy*, 1947, p. 101)

History of Education in the U.S.

Many aspects of contemporary higher education can be traced back to the establishment of colleges and universities in the late 19th century (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Understanding the evolution of higher education in the U.S. is important to understanding the ways in which public and private institutions operate today. Further, understanding how higher education has evolved provides insight into the continuing evolution of its needs.

The establishment of higher education in the U.S. began during the Colonial Era (1636–1789), when universities were being built upon Old World models (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). During the Emergent Nation Era (1790–1869), there was a rise in the number of small colleges established, increasing educational opportunities for citizens (p. 6). The influx of more students from a wider geography created more diversity within student bodies. The University Transformation Era (1870–1944) is best known for establishing research universities and the forward movement of faculty professionalization (p. 6). Colleges and universities increased in number and size during

the Mass Higher Education Era (1945–1975), improving student access to higher education but also creating increased reliance on federal student aid (p. 6).

When compared to the Mass Higher Education Era, the Consolidation Era (1976–1993) does not show an increase in colleges or universities or faculty professionalization. This era was characterized by increased reliance on state level governance, increased tuition and fees, and lower public per capita funding (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The historically significant Contemporary Era (1994–2009) is characterized by many differences in higher education in comparison to previous eras. This era illustrates increase and diversification of sources of funding, including private donors, corporations, and students (p. 6). This diversification had impacts on accountability, resulting in increased freedom from governmental restrictions. Additionally, there was an increase in the number of colleges and universities established in the for-profit sector of higher education (p. 6).

As evidenced by the different eras, higher education undergoes continuous evolution, providing students with educational opportunities across many disciplines. While certain areas of academia have evolved with great success, other areas are in need of further attention and research to advance to a more optimal level. Areas significant to the success of students and academia and specific to this research study are student development, student retention, and student diversity, specifically with respect to active-duty and deployed military personnel enrolled in higher education. The purpose of this research study was to identify gaps in understanding of the specialized educational needs of that population and to develop new insights and knowledge that may be helpful to

college and university administrators, faculty, and staff in designing and implementing initiatives, strategic plans, and resources to address these needs most effectively.

Student Development Theory

Theory can be defined as a set of abstract principles that predict and organize facts within a specific body of knowledge (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).

Student development theory is “a conceptual and theoretical foundation used to understand and work with college students” (Walker, 2008, p. 3). Student development is the application of theories and principles by college and university administrators, faculty, and staff to effectively and efficiently aid students in their personal growth and development (p. 3). Through challenge and support, students become more complex individuals (Gardner, 2009). Student development theories lend insight into the increasing complexity of individuals. The theories of “student development have built on prior conceptualizations of development and change to form their models;” thus, student development theories are often interrelated (p. 16).

Through the historical evolution of student development theories, broad categories of student development theory have emerged, including psychosocial development, social identity development, cognitive-structural development, moral development, and typology theory (Gardner, 2009). Each category is represented by major theorists and their contributions to student development theory. This research study was guided by a psychosocial theory, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1984), and by a theoretical model of persistence and retention developed by Tinto (2012). Tinto’s model, titled “A Framework for Institutional Action: The

Conditions for Student Success,” is referred to more simply in this study as “Tinto’s Framework for Institutional Action for Student Success” or “Tinto’s theoretical retention model.” Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and Tinto’s theoretical retention model are discussed in Chapter 2, Literature Review and applied in Chapter 5, Significance of Findings.

Student Retention

The relationship between education and earnings has long been studied and analyzed (Julian & Kominski, 2011). Many people believe that achievement in higher levels of education results in better jobs and, therefore, increased earnings (p. 1). As cited by Julian and Kominski, U.S. Census Bureau report illustrates the value of education by providing an estimate of potential earnings, based on a person’s achieved level of education (p. 4). Relying on “the construction of a large table of annual median earnings for every combination of age, gender, race/ethnicity, and education,” Synthetic Work-Life Earnings for an individual can be estimated (p. 4). The data for the Census Bureau report was collected between 2006 and 2008 in the Bureau’s Multiyear American Community Survey (p. 1).

Because using the actual dollars that individuals earned over their working lifespans would have required the authors to have retrospective earnings data for 40 years, the authors chose to use synthetic estimates. Synthetic estimates are determined from data using a one-point-in-time cross-sectional survey (Julian & Kominski, 2011). The data analysis indicated that there is a “clear and well-defined relationship between education and earnings, and that this relationship perseveres, even after considering a

collection of other personal and geographic characteristics” (p. 13). The implications of achieving different levels of education can result in large earning variances to as much as millions of dollars over a 40-year working life (p. 13).

Student retention in U.S. colleges and universities is significant with respect to the key role that education can play in quality of life and well-being, presenting issues that are persistent, challenging, and costly. Since the 1900s, student enrollment has increased tenfold, to approximately 14 million students each year; however, the institutional graduation rate has remained at a constant 50% for most of the last half-century (Swail, 2004). In other words, 50% of students who enroll in higher education drop out of school and fail to complete their degree programs.

According to Swail (2004), approximately 14%, or 1 in 7 students, leave their initial college or university after the first year, and 13% leave the following year. Additionally, during or after the sophomore year, 24% of students leave their initial college or university; therefore, only about one-third of student retention issues occur at the “traditional” time of departure (p. 5). As college and university campuses become increasingly diverse, student retention often becomes more challenging. In the design of initiatives, programs, and policies aimed at effectively addressing retention percentages among students enrolled in higher education, understanding student diversity is essential.

Student Diversity

A diverse student body on college and university campuses provides increased opportunity for creative and critical thinking as well as more opportunity for collaboration and innovation. Most often, student diversity is characterized by race or

ethnic background; however, diversity is also measured by other factors, such as socioeconomic levels, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious affiliation, and military status. Increasing minority student representation in higher education is both important and beneficial. According to Franklin (2013), the full integration of diverse student populations on college campuses promotes a fair and just society. Student diversity is an important and relevant topic in higher education “as institutions, policy makers, and economists increasingly recognize the value that accrues at many levels of having a skilled and diverse student body” (para. 1).

Diverse student populations do not typically conform to the conventional conception of traditional university students. Within the last two decades, minority and non-traditional students have contributed to a much more diverse student population. An example of student diversity in higher education that changed the conventional view of the traditional student is the student-worker (Munro, 2011). Students who are employed full-time may be unable to focus solely on the responsibility of study and learning; as a result, they may be unable to fulfill the expectations of a fully engaged scholar (p. 118). Many institutions of higher learning have acknowledged the need for students to earn an income while earning an education, and many have increased efforts to accommodate the needs of student-workers as these populations become more and more commonplace.

One student-worker population that is distinctively different from traditional students is deployed military personnel enrolled in higher education. Because deployments can be unexpected and vary in nature, these students face unique challenges. Although the importance of diverse student populations in higher education is widely

accepted and researched, to date, there have been no research studies that focus solely on deployed military students. While many colleges and universities acknowledge certain issues associated with the military, such as educational benefits and the needs of veteran students, there is a need for further attention to and research of deployed military personnel enrolled in colleges and universities.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944

Following World War I, discharged veterans received little more than a train ticket home and a \$60 allowance (U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Once home, many battle-hardened veterans found it difficult to assimilate into civilian life (para. 6). Securing jobs and earning a living was proving to be difficult. The Great Depression added to the hardships of veterans, as did Congress' failed attempt at an intervention, the passing of the World War Adjusted Act of 1924, commonly known as the "Bonus Act" (para. 6). The Bonus Act provided a monetary bonus to veterans, based on the number of days served; however, most veterans would not see any of the money for at least 20 years (para. 6).

During the summer of 1932, a group of veterans marched on Washington, D.C., and demanded full payment of their bonuses. Despite their best efforts, the veterans did not receive any money. The veterans' march ended in a bitter standoff with U.S. troops, resulting in one of the greatest periods of unrest and turmoil in the history of the nation's capital (U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). World War II and the millions of returning veterans provided Congress with an opportunity for redemption; inaction was thought of as an invitation to imminent social and economic crisis (para. 8). To avoid dissension

among the nation's returning veterans and to avoid another economic depression, the need for immediate action and new legislation was paramount.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the "GI Bill of Rights" or simply the "GI Bill," has been heralded as one of the most significant pieces of federal legislation produced in the history of the U.S. (U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). The act has had major impacts on the U.S. economically, socially, and politically (para. 1). Key provisions focused on the needs of veterans, including "education and training, loan guaranty for homes, farms or businesses, and unemployment pay" (para. 11). Since World War II, the GI Bill has served as an educational incentive to military personnel and veterans and has often been credited for establishing the foundation of today's middle class (O'Herrin, 2011). The G.I. Bill has been notably influential and "responsible for educating millions of scientists, doctors, engineers, businessmen, authors, actors, and teachers, while providing vocational training for millions more" (p. 15).

Before the war, earning a higher education was an unreachable dream for most American veterans—the GI Bill provided many of them with the opportunity to enroll in colleges and universities (U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). The original GI Bill expired on July 25, 1956. At that time, 7.8 million of 16 million World War II service members had already participated in an education or training program (para. 13). In 1984, revisions to the original GI Bill were made by former Mississippi Congressman Gillespie V. Montgomery. The focus of the Montgomery GI Bill was to ensure "that the legacy of the original GI Bill lives on, as U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

home loan guaranty and education programs continue to work for our newest generation of combat veterans” (para. 16).

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act

The most distinguishable increase in education benefits afforded to active-duty service members and veterans since the GI Bill and the Montgomery GI Bill was achieved with the establishment of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, better known as the “Post-9/11 GI Bill” (O’Herrin, 2011; Vacchi, 2012). In 2008, the Post-9/11 GI Bill was signed into law, creating the opportunity for increased education benefits for military personnel who had served for 90 or more days since September 11, 2001 (“New Post-9/11 GI Bill,” 2012). This bill offers the best educational benefits ever afforded to active-duty personnel, reservists, and veterans in the nations’ history (Vacchi, 2012).

The Post-9/11 GI Bill is designed to cover the cost of fees and tuition for eligible veterans attending in-state public undergraduate higher education (O’Herrin, 2011). For eligible veterans attending private institutions, enrolled in graduate school, or paying out-of-state tuition, colleges and universities may enter into an agreement with the VA, whereby the VA will match contributions provided by the institution, should there be further costs (p. 15). Furthermore, this new GI Bill provides an annual book stipend and a monthly housing stipend. In 2010, legislation approved the expansion of the bill to an additional 85,000 National Guard troops. Also in 2010, Congress applied the educational benefits of the bill to vocational training (p. 15).

In the Post-9/11 GI Bill's first year of implementation, more than 500,000 service members and veterans applied for certificates of eligibility. As a result of these 500,000 applications, more than 300,000 military personnel and dependents used educational benefits that the bill affords (O'Herrin, 2011). According to the VA, since mid-2009, it has provided active-duty service members, veterans, and dependents with more than \$23.6 billion in GI Bill educational benefits (Reynolds, 2013). Recent data indicate that the number of service members and veterans applying for certificates of eligibility and attending college continues to increase (O'Herrin, 2011; Reynolds, 2013).

In the fall of 2012, the VA received more than 470,000 enrollments for Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits (Reynolds, 2013), representing a 12% increase in the use of these benefits as compared to fall 2011 (para. 5). For eligible veterans, 2012 was the first year of college eligibility for those who had specifically enlisted hoping to secure the educational benefits of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. In fiscal year 2012, veterans and dependents using benefits under the bill were enrolled in 3,630 colleges and universities (Vacchi, 2012). Institutions of higher education had not experienced such a significant increase in numbers of service members and veterans on college campuses since World War II (Cook & Kim, 2009). Table 1 illustrates the percentages of undergraduate and graduate military service members and veterans enrolled in higher education, based on data from 2007-2008.

Table 1

*Percentage Distribution of Undergraduates and Graduate Students, by Military Status:
2007–2008*

Data from 2007–2008	Undergraduate		Graduate	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Total Students	100.0	20,927,000	100.0	3,457,000
Military Students				
Veterans	3.1	657,000	3.1	107,000
Active-Duty	0.7	139,000	0.8	29,000
Reserves	0.4	76,000	0.2	9,000
Nonmilitary Students	95.8	20,055,000	95.8	3,312,000

Source: Radford (2011), Table 1. Based on NPSAS:08 data.

Administrators in higher education expect to see a continued increase of enrolled active-duty military personnel, reservists, and veterans across college campuses (Vacchi, 2012). For this reason, increased efforts in understanding all the subpopulations of military students are needed to best address this entire student population. According to Cook and Kim (2009), “Military personnel and veterans will be a tremendous asset to higher education, as they have been in the past, but they have needs that are distinct from other students” (p. iii). Military service members enroll in higher education to expand their knowledge and skill sets, both academically and professionally. Educational and career achievement often results in promotion within the military, in addition to facilitating the transition into civilian life. As the numbers of military personnel and

veterans increase across college campuses, how well prepared is higher education to serve this distinct population?

Statement of the Problem

While many higher-education institutions have addressed the educational needs of minority students in significant ways, gaps in meeting the needs of students who are active-duty or deployed military have yet to be adequately addressed. By developing a greater understanding of the different military student subpopulations, including active-duty personnel, reservists, and veterans, initiatives and policies can be designed to “positively impact their college experiences, particularly their learning, which is not only why veterans come to college, but also the reason for the GI Bill benefits” (Vacchi, 2012, p. 16).

At the 2008 American Council on Education Annual Meeting, California State University Chancellor Charlie Reed challenged campus officials to take stock of existing programs and services for military students and assess their readiness:

I’m going to give you an assignment. Go back to your institution. Do an assessment of how you’re doing with programs and services for service members and veterans. You won’t find a pretty picture. What you will find is that you need to reorganize and reprioritize. (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. iii)

In an effort to highlight existing programs and services offered to military students across U.S. college and university campuses, a national survey was administered by the American Council on Education, along with the Service Members Opportunity Colleges, the American Association of State College and Universities, NAFSA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and the National Association of Veterans’ Program Administrators (Cook & Kim, 2009; O’Herrin, 2011). Officials at 723

institutions of higher education responded, detailing existing programs and services created for military personnel (Cook & Kim, 2009). The data analysis of their responses indicated that 57% were providing specific programs and services designed for military students, and approximately 60% were providing such programs and services as part of their institution's long-term strategic plan (p. vii). Long-term strategic plans are important, but of equal and perhaps greater importance is the need for immediate and established initiatives and programs designed to improve the abilities of institutions of higher learning to meet various specific needs of military students.

The survey results indicated that 74% of public 4-year and 66% of public 2-year colleges and universities had designed and established programs and services specifically for military personnel, as opposed to 36% of private not-for-profit institutions (Cook & Kim, 2009). Additionally, the results indicated that less than 50% of all colleges and universities with such programs and services offered administrators, faculty, and staff professional development opportunities "to acquire information about the unique needs of military student populations, existing campus resources, and promising practices to create a positive campus environment" (pp. vii-viii).

The survey data demonstrated that there is great diversity in the types of programs and services offered to military personnel and veterans who are students or to those working in higher education (Cook & Kim, 2009). Between September 11, 2001, and the time the study results were published, 65% of colleges and universities that offered programs and services specifically designed for military personnel and veterans had increased their emphasis on the establishment of new programs and marketing and

outreach recruitment strategies (p. viii). While the survey results indicated that institutions of higher education are making progress in the design and establishment of programs and services addressing the needs of military personnel and veterans, the data highlight areas of further needed research and improvements.

This qualitative case study focused on the need for a greater understanding of the unique needs of active-duty and deployed military students enrolled in higher education. Many current and implemented policies and procedures designed for these students demonstrate a limited focus, mainly on tuition refund policies and re-enrollment processes. There has been little consistency among institutions of higher education in terms of policies and procedures designed for active-duty and deployed military students.

According to the survey results, approximately 80% of all colleges and universities have established tuition refund policies that can be implemented in the event of military deployments (Cook & Kim, 2009). However, “only 22% of institutions with programs and services for military personnel have developed an expedited re-enrollment process to help students restart their academic efforts following a military deployment or activation” (Snead & Baridon, 2009/2010, p. 2). Furthermore, 62% of respondents required active-duty personnel returning from deployment to complete the standard re-enrollment process, and 16% required service members to reapply and be readmitted to the institutions prior to enrolling in classes (Cook & Kim, 2009).

While tuition refund policies and re-enrollment processes are important to active-duty military students enrolled in higher education, the survey results indicated that there is a need for a more comprehensive understanding of and improvement in the services

designed for these students. Deployment should be proactively and thoughtfully considered and approached rather than being reacted to once these students have been deployed. Reacting to deployment leaves institutions, programs, faculties, and active-duty military students at risk for increased challenges and obstacles. It is important to recognize that there is no single best practice for serving these students. The different deployment locations around the world present unique challenges and obstacles.

Designing programs and services that maintain a degree of flexibility is important—all deployments are different; consequently, different strategies are necessary.

Research Questions

To understand the pursuit of higher education among deployed troops, the following research questions were used to guide this qualitative research study:

- What are the motivations or reasons why active-duty military service members pursue higher education while deployed?
- How do military students who have experienced deployments describe their educational pursuits?
- What challenges or stressors do active-duty military students face while deployed?
- What types of support do active-duty military students receive from college or university administrators, faculty, and military educational services?
- What types of support do active-duty military students receive from higher-ranking military personnel?

Definition of Terms

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) defines the following terms that are used in this research study:

Active-duty military—“Full-time duty in the active military service of the United States. This includes members of the Reserve Components serving on active duty or full-time training duty, but does not include full-time National Guard duty” (DoD, 2010, p. 2).

Prepare to deploy order—“An order issued by competent authority to move forces or prepare forces for movement” (DoD, 2010, p. 288).

Deployment planning—“Operational planning directed toward the movement of forces and sustainment resources from their original locations to a specific operational area for conducting the joint operations contemplated in a given plan” (DoD, 2010, p. 106).

Deployment—“The relocation of forces and materiel to desired operational areas. Deployment encompasses all activities from origin or home station through destination, specifically including intra-continental United States, intertheater, and intratheater movement legs, staging, and holding areas” (DoD, 2010, p. 105).

Base—“1. A locality from which operations are projected or supported. 2. An area or locality containing installations which provide logistic or other support” (DoD, 2010, p. 34).

Base of operations—“An area or facility from which a military force begins its offensive operations, to which it falls back in case of reverse, and in which supply facilities are organized” (DoD, 2010, p. 36).

Bare base—

A base having minimum essential facilities to house, sustain, and support operations to include, if required, a stabilized runway, taxiways, and aircraft parking areas. A bare base must have a source of water that can be made potable. Other requirements to operate under bare base conditions form a necessary part of the force package deployed to the bare base. (DoD, 2010, p. 34)

Intermediate staging base—“A tailorable, temporary location used for staging forces, sustainment and/or extraction into and out of an operational area” (DoD, 2010, p. 184).

Advanced operations base—

In special operations, a small temporary base established near or within a joint special operations area to command, control, and/or support training or tactical operations. Facilities are normally austere. The base may be ashore or afloat. If ashore, it may include an airfield or unimproved airstrip, a pier, or an anchorage. An advanced operations base is normally controlled and/or supported by a main operations base or a forward operations base. (DoD, 2010, p. 4)

Main operations base—

In special operations, a base established by a joint force special operations component commander or a subordinate special operations component commander in friendly territory to provide sustained command and control, administration, and logistic support to special operations activities in designated areas. MOB. (DoD, 2010, p. 221)

Force protection—“Preventive measures taken to mitigate hostile actions against Department of Defense personnel (to include family members), resources, facilities, and critical information” (DoD, 2010, p. 143).

Threat analysis—

In antiterrorism, a continual process of compiling and examining all available information concerning potential terrorist activities by terrorist groups which could target a facility. A threat analysis will review the factors of a terrorist group's existence, capability, intentions, history, and targeting, as well as the security environment within which friendly forces operate. Threat analysis is an essential step in identifying probability of terrorist attack and results in a threat assessment. (DoD, 2010, p. 371)

Threat assessment—“In antiterrorism, examining the capabilities, intentions, and activities, past and present, of terrorist organizations as well as the security environment within which friendly forces operate to determine the level of threat” (DoD, 2010, p. 371).

Terrorist threat level—

An intelligence threat assessment of the level of terrorist threat faced by US personnel and interests in a foreign country. The assessment is based on a continuous intelligence analysis of a minimum of five elements: terrorist group existence, capability, history, trends, and targeting. There are four threat levels: LOW, MODERATE, SIGNIFICANT, and HIGH. Threat levels should not be confused with force protection conditions. Threat level assessments are provided to senior leaders to assist them in determining the appropriate local force protection condition. (DoD, 2010, p. 368)

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations of This Research Study

An underlying assumption of this study is that investigation into the experiences of active-duty and deployed military service members can provide a greater understanding of how deployment may affect or influence their pursuit of higher education. As discussed by Stake (2010), qualitative research “relies primarily on human experience and understanding” (p. 11). In accordance with conceptual guidance for qualitative research laid out by Merriam (2009), I have assumed that the use of a qualitative-methodology approach can achieve an in-depth understanding of participants’

experiences as articulated or defined by the participants' perspectives, as opposed to my own perspective. To gain the participants' trust, I discussed the purpose and goals of the study and stated that their participation and all collected data would remain strictly confidential. The participants' honesty and openness were significant to accurate interpretations. Also in alignment with Merriam (2009), throughout the study, I was experientially focused and sought to accurately understand how individuals interpret, construct, and apply meaning to their experiences.

In a research study, characteristics that define boundaries and limit scope are called "delimitations" (Simon, 2011). Delimitations prevent the researcher from generalizing the findings to all populations or, in other words, claiming that the findings are true for all people at all times in all places (Bryant, 2004). A delimitation of this study is the limitation of the sample of participants to active-duty military service members who were deployed while enrolled in higher education. This study does not attempt to account for the experiences of all active-duty, reserve, retired, and Guard personnel enrolled in higher education. The rates of completion of college classes and student retention among service members may vary. The experiences of deployed as opposed to active-duty personnel who are not deployed while enrolled in higher education may also vary.

Limitations are the potential restrictions of a research study, most often influenced by the chosen methodology (Bryant, 2004). A possible limitation of this qualitative study is the small sample of participants. Often, the goal of a qualitative study is to provide illumination and a greater understanding of complex or multifaceted social issues

(Marshall, 1996). In a qualitative methodological approach, specifically, a case study, selecting a purposeful sample or a sample within the identified case is necessary. Merriam (2009) states that “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). Purposeful sampling provides the researcher with greater opportunity for information-rich cases, lending insight into “issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 77). Although the sample in this study is purposeful, the sample is small, thereby potentially limiting the generalizations of the findings to other deployed military students enrolled in colleges and universities.

The lack of prior research studies or literature on deployed military service members enrolled in higher education may also be a potential limitation of this study. However, while some may see a lack of prior or current literature as a potential limitation, I see it as an important indication of a need for further research—hence, the significance of this study.

Significance of the Study

A goal of this research study was to gain a greater understanding of the experiences and transitions of active-duty and deployed military personnel enrolled in higher education. With a better understanding of these students and deployment, institutions of higher education can design and implement initiatives, policies, and resources that will positively influence deployed service members’ learning and overall educational experience. Aligning a more informed understanding of active-duty and

deployed military students with Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1984) and Tinto's theoretical retention model (2012) will benefit these students as well as colleges and universities.

The benefits and value of a college education are considerable. Earning a college degree often results in greater economic advantages and improved well-being. The positive impacts of higher education and the importance of student retention have driven educators and researchers to strive to identify and understand predictors of college success (Nes, Evans, & Segerstrom, 2009). According to Nes et al. (2009), "Research has shown retention to be associated with motivation, academic performance, and distress or adjustment, all of which can result from optimism" (pp. 1897-1899). Furthermore, research has indicated that, in students, higher levels of optimism lead to higher levels of persistence (p. 1904). Students who demonstrate optimism often expect positive results, thereby working harder and longer to achieve their goals: "Generalized dispositional optimism and more specific academic optimism were associated with an increased chance of remaining in college, increased motivation, and decreased distress" (p. 1903).

Deployed military students enrolled in higher education face varied environments and challenges. Persistence in college and overall college performance may depend on whether these service members can effectively and efficiently adjust to the various responsibilities and demands of college while deployed (Nes et al., 2009). Maintaining a high degree of optimism and, thus, higher levels of motivation and persistence among deployed military students may be directly affected by administrators, faculty, and staff working in higher education. Colleges and universities that demonstrate a greater

understanding of these students and the varied factors of deployment will likely demonstrate a more comprehensive and supportive approach when serving this important student population.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A review of relevant literature and research studies “offers a point of reference for discussing the contribution the current study will make to advancing the knowledge base” in a certain area (Merriam, 2009, p, 72). This chapter discusses major sources that informed the current research study, in an attempt to synthesize preliminary informational sources, research studies, and theoretical frameworks to highlight the strengths and limitations of the existing literature, how or why the literature is relevant to this study, and implications for the needs identified in this study. A large number of supplementary sources were also used; these are cited as appropriate throughout the study and included in the References list. The discussion of theoretical frameworks in the second section of this chapter is of particular importance to the findings (Chapter 5) of this research study.

Military educational benefits and the challenges that veterans face in transitioning to civilian life have been researched and well documented in recent literature. Additionally, certain impacts of deployment—specifically, the effects of war-zone experiences such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) among military personnel and veterans—have received much attention. Despite this attention, there is little research or literature surrounding the impacts of deployment on active-duty military service members enrolled in higher education. There remains an urgent need for a greater understanding of active-duty and deployed military students enrolled in higher education (Asbury & Martin, 2012).

Therefore, the review of literature centered primarily on active-duty personnel, deployment, and prior research studies focusing on military service members and

veterans. Although the sources reviewed do not specifically address deployed military students, they do address veteran students and accentuate the need for additional studies concerning deployed military students. Understanding the needs of active-duty military personnel who pursue higher education while deployed will provide college and university administrators, faculties, staffs, and the institutions' military services with greater insight and knowledge into effective design and implementation of necessary learning initiatives, strategic plans, and resources to address all areas of this distinct student population.

Preliminary Literature Review

The preliminary literature review categorizes informational sources as (1) literature focused on military students who had been involved in recent U.S. peacekeeping operations in general and (2) literature focused more specifically on military students who had been involved in intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and support missions and operations.

Recent U.S. peacekeeping operations. U.S. involvement in war-zone environments throughout the past decade has resulted in significantly increased deployments of active-duty military students. The recent U.S. peacekeeping operations—Operations Desert Shield and Storm, Operation Noble Eagle (ONE), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF, Afghanistan), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF, Iraq) renamed the Operation New Dawn (OND, Iraq)—resulted in an ever-increasing demand for U.S. deployed troops (Morreale, 2011). Table 2 documents the increase in

the total number of active-duty troops serving in the U.S. military between 2006 and 2011.

Table 2

Active-Duty Military Personnel: 2006–2011

Year	Army	Air Force	Navy	Marines	Total
2006 (June)	496,362	352,620	353,496	178,923	1,381,401
2007 (Aug.)	519,471	337,312	338,671	184,574	1,380,082
2011 (Sept.)	565,463	333,370	325,123	201,157	1,468,364

Source: “Active duty military personnel, 1940-2011,” (2013).

Since the beginnings of the wars in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, approximately 2.5 million U.S. service members have been deployed to fight in these locations (Adams, 2013). Of the 2.5 million, more than 825,000 were deployed overseas more than one time (para. 4). DoD records indicate that, as recently as 2012, approximately 37,000 U.S. service members had been deployed more than five times, and 400,000 military personnel had completed three or more deployments (para. 5). In May 2013, there were approximately 1.5 million U.S. Marines, soldiers, airmen, and sailors deployed in war zones locations or combat missions worldwide (Roberts & Knight, 2013).

Intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and support missions and operations. As of May 2011, there were 1,431,403 men and women serving in the U.S. military (DoD, 2011). The U.S. relies on a military force of all volunteer service members. Hundreds of thousands of service members have been sent on multiple combat

deployments to war zone locations (Peter, 2011). In addition, hundreds of thousands of active-duty service members have completed intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and support missions and operations. According to the DoD, “Deployment encompasses all activities from origin or home station through destination, specifically including intra-continental U.S., intertheater, and intratheater movement legs, staging, and holding areas” (DoD, 2010, p. 105). Table 3 displays the number of U.S. active-duty service members in selected regions, including the U.S. and territories, as of September 30, 2011 (“U.S. Military Personnel,” 2013).

Table 3

U.S. Military Personnel on Active Duty in Selected Regions

Country	Total	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
U.S. and Territories	1,138,044	497,595	213,035	151,806	275,608
Germany	53,766	38,360	489	407	14,510
Italy	10,801	3174	3198	249	4180
Spain	1479	78	894	143	364
Turkey	1491	52	6	14	1419
United Kingdom	9382	356	304	70	8652
Japan	39,222	2501	6851	17,208	12,662
Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom)	109,200	71,400	5300	21,400	11,100
Bahrain	2142	17	1818	278	29
Iraq and Kuwait (Operation New Dawn)	92,200	53,600	20,500	2400	15,700

Source: “U.S. military personnel by country” (2013).

Once an active-duty service member has received a mobilization alert, “preparation for deployment begins, including required briefings, additional training, medical and dental evaluations, and possibly counseling to ensure that service members are ready and able to be deployed” (“Deployment: An Overview,” 2013, para. 3). The prepare-to-deploy order often requires troops to spend increased amounts of time to prepare for the deployment phase fully and successfully. The deployment phase is characterized by the physical movement of active-duty service members and units from their home installations or bases to the designated theater of operations (para. 4).

An overall threat analysis, which includes the type of threat and terrorist threat level, determines the type of mission and deployment location for active-duty personnel. Missions are often characterized by using threat analysis, resulting in differences in the types of bases to which service members are deployed and differences in degrees of force protection. Although there may be differences in deployment locations, deployment frequently results in increased time and energy focused on a specific mission, leaving little to no time or opportunity for much else, other than working, sleeping, and eating.

Deployments often result in increased interpersonal stressors associated with the pressures of being separated from family and friends and working and living in proximity to other troops (Vogt, Samper, King, King, & Martin, 2008). Furthermore, stressors such as increased work hours, exposure to extreme temperatures, poor sleeping conditions, and changes in diet often affect deployed service members. Deployments specific to war-zone locations may result in service members experiencing and witnessing traumatic events such as gunfire, bombing, torture, murder, and suicide. Because of such

exposures, military personnel are likely to experience TBIs, PTSD, depression, heightened levels of acute and chronic stress and anxiety, and adjustment and sleeping disorders during and following deployment (p. 45).

Awareness of factors such as the type of base, terrorist threat level, Internet connectivity, base level restrictions, temperature, work hours, diet, and sleep is significant to understanding the particular needs of deployed military students. While on missions, infantry soldiers, for example, often spend long stretches of time off base; therefore, finding time to study is increasingly difficult (Peter, 2011). Additionally, many infantry soldiers may live weeks or months in abandoned fields or buildings with computers that are used only in support of the mission and operations (para. 14). When the soldiers are not on missions, “they might spend long days wearing 100 pounds of equipment as they scramble up mountainsides and patrol deserts in 120-degree heat, only to return to base to stand guard for several hours” (para. 14). This type of environment is certainly not conducive to studying or completing assignments. For other service members who work on base, their shifts are often 12 to 15 hours a day, 6 days a week. After working long hours and many times in temperatures of 100 or more degrees, the thought of returning to a bunk to study or complete an assignment can turn away even the most motivated troops (para. 16).

Review of Research Studies

To build upon what could be learned from the preliminary literature review, a review of additional relevant research studies was conducted. The results lend insight

into the importance of my study and why this study may advance, refine, or revise current knowledge of deployed military students (Merriam, 2009).

DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) and voices of student veterans.

Findings from a research study conducted by DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) indicated that there was “the need for a comprehensive and holistic system for assisting veterans” who are transitioning from active duty to college student status (p. 92).

According to the findings, the three sample universities used in this study did not adequately meet the needs of student veterans (p. 92). To most effectively meet the needs of this unique student population, identification of each student veteran on college campuses is key, the authors stated, adding that identifying student veterans must be a coordinated effort among campus professionals across functional areas including administration, academic affairs, and student affairs (p. 93). DiRamio et al. (2008) also stated that early identification of student veterans and coordinated efforts among university departments to address their unique needs would ensure an inclusive campus program for these students.

DiRamio et al. (2008) concluded that, to successfully identify incoming student veterans, there is great value in providing a mandatory orientation designed for them. Once student veterans had self-identified, departments beyond financial aid would have the opportunity to further assist these students (pp. 93-94). The authors discuss the importance of a simple identification process—one that is not elaborate or complex. Additionally, to encourage self-identification among student veterans and to increase

participation rates, DiRamio et al. (2008) suggest that the college or university advertise the benefits of registering as a veteran.

The findings of this study also highlight the value of transition coaches or mentors to student veterans. The authors state that the job description of a transition coach must maintain certain degrees of flexibility and be tailored to meet the needs of a specific college or university (DiRamio et al., 2008). In addition, the purpose of the transition coach or mentor is to offer the veteran guidance and help with administrative and academic concerns as well as provide support for the emotional aspects of the transition from active-duty service member to civilian (p. 94). Transition coaches or mentors with former military experience such as service in combat or war zones are likely to prove most helpful and favorable in this type of initiative (p. 94).

Another important implication of this research study is that academic advising is a significant and essential piece of a comprehensive and holistic approach to working with this student population. The study identified a need for academic advisors to be alerted to the names of student veterans through the college or university's registry (DiRamio et al., 2008). Professional development and training addressing institutional policy on military transcripts, withdrawal or readmission due to deployment, and military education benefits, for example, were identified as important elements to understanding and most effectively working with student veterans (p. 94).

Because the transition from being an active-duty service member to being a civilian enrolled in college had been difficult for many participants in this study, the authors concluded that postsecondary institutions must make great efforts to approach

student veterans comprehensively and holistically (DiRamio et al., 2008). They also noted that, because global conflicts will likely continue, resulting in heightened numbers of troops, colleges and universities should plan for increased numbers of student veterans across campuses (p. 97).

Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming (2011) and student veterans and college re-enrollment. A research study conducted by Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming (2011) focused on influences that affected student veterans' navigation of college re-enrollment. The results of the study indicated that military influence had perhaps the most significant effect on student veterans in navigating re-enrollment in college. Participants stated that after serving in the military, their emphasis on academics increased, resulting in improved GPAs (p. 321). They discussed how their military service and experiences had matured them and encouraged self-sufficiency, resulting in increased confidence, self-reliance, and pride (p. 321). Additionally, they discussed how military experiences allowed them to see the world from different perspectives. They also discussed how military service intensified the age gap they felt with non-military peers and how, as a result, they found it difficult to understand and relate to non-military college students (p. 321). Also challenging for these student veterans were the environment and structure of the college campus. The participants discussed how they often operated within the rigid and disciplined structures and protocols of the military and how it was therefore challenging to transition to the less rigid structure or more casual environment of a college campus (p. 321). Participants' statements indicated that self-

sufficiency and pride influenced their limited utilization of both academic and social support systems.

As discussed by participants, military influence also contributed to feelings of invisibility on college campuses (Livingston et al., 2011). Military experiences had a direct effect on these student veterans' development of maturity, humility, and pride, often determining whether or not and to whom the participants would disclose their veteran status (p. 322). Pride influenced disclosure, "as student veterans were not inclined to announce and use their veteran status to receive preferential treatment" (p. 322). Additionally, participants "alluded to humility, a concept closely related to military influence and maturity"—factors that influenced them to be selective when disclosing veteran status (p. 322). The academic or social support received during re-enrollment was directly affected by the student veterans' "invisibility," often making for a lonesome experience (p. 323).

For the aforementioned reasons, the participants in this research study did not often seek academic support from college and university personnel. The authors concluded that "fellow veterans provided the most prominent source of support, both academic and social" (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 323). Because of the participants' maturity and lack of commonality with their college peers, these student veterans felt more comfortable with one another and therefore relied on their military colleagues for support. In addition to their military colleagues, the student veterans often relied on faculty and academic advisors with military experience (p. 323).

The findings of this study have important implications for those working in higher education. First, the authors indicated that identifying student veterans on college campuses is essential to the overall student success of these students (Livingston et al., 2008). They stated that the identification process does not need to be complex—and that simply adding a veteran data field to college entrance and re-enrollment applications would allow for a more accurate count of this unique student population (p. 328). Second, they stated that it is important for postsecondary institutions to employ faculty and academic advisors with military experience (p. 328). Student veterans often seek the guidance of those with military experience; therefore, providing opportunities for relationships between faculty, academic advisors, and student veterans would result in greater academic and social support and, thus, in greater overall student success.

Thomas (2010) and the VET NET Ally program. A research study conducted by Thomas (2010) demonstrated the value of immediate initiatives and programs designed to meet the needs of active-duty service members and veterans. Thomas (2010) created and piloted the VET NET Ally program. The content of the program addressed the needs of veterans and was “modeled after the widely used Safe Zone Ally program used on many campuses nationwide to educate staff, faculty, and students on the needs and concerns of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transgender students” (p. 5). The VET NET Ally program provided staff and faculty with 4-hour training sessions focused on “pre-and post-military culture, personal identity issues, and the services available to veterans to assist them in achieving their personal, social, and educational goals” (p. 1). Once staff and faculty had completed the 4-hour training sessions, participants had the

opportunity to evaluate the training sessions and provide feedback on their value and effectiveness (p. 1).

Major findings of staff and faculty participants in this study included positive changes in knowledge about and attitudes toward military students (Thomas, 2010). The data analysis and findings suggested that participants' overall knowledge of military students had increased from participation in the 4-hour training sessions. Many participants stated that the panel discussion with military students was the most effective element of the training (p. 84). One participant stated, "Having [military] students from the university provide a personal story to help those who have not served understand the experience of military service and the transition from the service to the campus is the highlight of the program" (p. 84).

At the time of Thomas's study, there was no existing literature identifying other veterans' awareness programs modeled from a Safe Zone type of model (Thomas, 2010). The training evaluations from Thomas's study emphasized the lack of literature and represented a "baseline for future iterations of this program and for others to use in the development and conduct of future programs at other institutions" (p. 86). The findings of the training evaluations were insightful and demonstrated that, although there had been an increase in overall knowledge of military students, there was room for further improvement. The findings indicated "that more work must be done in providing participants with information about veterans, veterans' issues, and the services available to them" (p. 76).

Morreale (2011) and academic motivation and self-concept. Morreale (2011) focused a research study on the academic motivation and academic self-concept of military veterans in higher education. She identified a lack of literature demonstrating a full theoretical or practical understanding of veterans' experiences in the higher-education environment—in particular, the college classroom—and of veterans' perceptions of academic self and academic motivations. Morreale (2011) suggested that much of the current literature focused primarily on deficit models, as opposed to the strengths of military students. She stated that, because of the lack of relevant literature and the ever-increasing number of military personnel enrolled in higher education, it was imperative for research to clearly identify both the strengths and the challenges that veterans face. In addition to focusing on the strengths of military students, Morreale (2011) placed an increased focus on variables such as academic self-concept and academic motivation.

The purposes of Morreale's study (2011) were to highlight the experiences of students who had served in any of four U.S. military peacekeeping missions—the first Persian Gulf War, ONE, OEF, and OIF/OND—and to describe the academic self-concept and motivations of these students. Morreale (2011) explored how academic self-concept and academic motivations of military students were affected by potential major variables such as exposure to combat, grade or rank, and length and number of deployments.

The results of Morreale's (2011) study indicated that there are several implications of those higher-education practices focused on military students—in areas ranging from one-to-one interactions with these students to the design and application of

programs and policies in academic and student affairs (p. 137). In the design of programs and policies, higher-education administrators and policymakers need to consider the diversity of military students as well as the complexities of academic self-concept and motivations presented by military personnel enrolled in higher education (p. 137).

The study suggested that military students are similar to other non-traditional students and therefore are best served by considering factors such as experience and by focusing on strengths to overcome challenges and on strategies to overcome barriers to attending classes (Morreale, 2011). Interventions and services that follow a one-stop model may be valuable in addressing a service member or veteran holistically (p. 140). The one-stop model supports (a) the creation of a central location where military students can learn and actively engage in a variety of services that have been determined to be of value to service members, and (b) the creation of a central location for campus and peer engagement (p. 140). Furthermore, the study findings encouraged colleges and universities to draw attention to the experiences of military students among other members of the campus community (pp. 140-141).

Morreale's (2011) study also identified the importance of professional development and training for administrators, faculty, and staff in higher education. Administrators, faculty, and staff must have opportunities to learn about the varied characteristics and experiences of military students to best serve this unique student population. Additionally, the study suggested a need for increased knowledge about the transitional needs of military students (p. 141).

Rumann (2010) and veterans in community colleges. Rumann's (2010) research study highlights (a) the importance of and need to give increased focus and attention to student veterans and initiatives, and (b) practices needed to best serve this population. As an increasing number of military students enroll in higher education, administrators, faculty, and staff are realizing the importance of understanding the transition experiences of military personnel (p. 2). The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have served as recent catalysts to identifying the need for greater understanding of service members' transitional experiences to higher education and to understanding the importance of providing the most effective programs and services for this student population (p. 2).

The purpose of Rumann's (2010) "phenomenological, qualitative research study was to explore the nature of the transition experiences of student war veterans who had re-enrolled in a community college following military deployments" (p. ix). Knowledge and insight gained from Rumann's study provided those working in higher education with a greater understanding of the transitional experiences of veterans, thereby "inform[ing] effective institutional practice and policy making" (Rumann, 2010, p. 3).

Rumann (2010) conducted a series of three semi-structured interviews with each participant. After data from the interviews had been carefully and thoroughly analyzed, four themes emerged that collectively described participants' transition experiences: "negotiating the transition, interactions and connections with others, changes in perspective and heightened maturity, and re-situating personal identities" (p. 87). The data analysis results showed that factors that played key roles in military students'

transitions included “(a) personal expectations and expectations of others, (b) change in environments (i.e., military to civilian), (c) difficulty getting back into the academic mode of thinking, especially initially, and (d) the ways in which participants perceived the college environment” (p. 149). Because all study participants had had previous experiences as both college students and civilians, it might seem that their transitions from the military into civilian life and college would have been without challenges; however, this was not the case (p. 149). Two significant factors that complicated participants’ transitions were deployments and spending extended amounts of time overseas (p. 149).

Rumann (2010) discussed that, while his study focused on veterans and their college experiences prior to and after deployments, the importance of other military student subpopulations must also be considered, including “(a) student veterans who return to college but later withdraw, (b) student veterans who choose not to re-enroll upon their return, (c) graduate student veterans, and (d) student veterans who enroll in college for the first time after active duty” (p. 182). In addition to these subpopulations, there has been an increase of veterans enrolling in colleges and universities while presenting physical, mental, and psychological disabilities; therefore, Rumann (2010) discussed the need for a more complete understanding of these concerns and how they relate to higher education. In his study, Rumann (2010) focused on veterans re-enrolling in community colleges; however, as he discussed, there is also a need for future research pertaining to veterans enrolled at 4-year universities, private universities, and for-profit universities. The results of Rumann’s study (2010) provided great insight into the

importance of understanding the transition experiences of military personnel. Currently, an increased percentage of colleges and universities are addressing this issue through varied initiatives, programs, and services.

McDonald (2011) and engagement of veterans in community colleges and student involvement theory. A research study conducted by McDonald (2011) discusses student engagement and involvement in community colleges. According to Astin (1984), student involvement “refers to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience” (p. 528). There are different forms of student involvement, such as immersion in academic work, participation in extracurricular activities, and interaction with institutional administration, faculty, and staff (p. 528). According to student involvement theory, “the greater the student’s involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development” (pp. 528-529).

McDonald (2011) emphasized student development theory in her discussion of military personnel and veterans enrolled in higher education. She stated that military personnel enrolled in higher education want “an educational environment that provides the necessary tools and resources to allow them to achieve their educational goals” (p. 146). Her study results indicated that military students benefit from a holistic and supportive environment; it is important for administrators to consider this when designing programs and services addressing this population.

McDonald’s (2011) study provided administrators, faculty, and staff working in higher education insight into the best preparation and design of support resources,

programs, and services for military students. It is important to provide an environment with a specific veterans' center so that military students have an opportunity to learn about and obtain resources, engage with supportive faculty and staff, and network with their peers (p. 146). A supportive environment empowers military students to feel engaged with others and to excel academically. It is important for colleges and universities to establish a supportive learning environment that is both welcoming and meaningful to service members and veterans (p. 147). Higher-education administrators should focus on "hiring individuals who can champion efforts on behalf of student veterans" (p. 147).

Implications of review of research studies. Morreale's (2011) and McDonald's (2011) research studies discussed the insufficiency of educational opportunities provided to faculty and administration that serve active-duty and deployed military students. Less than 50% of colleges and universities that offer military programs and services "offer opportunities for faculty and administrators to acquire information about the unique needs of military student populations, existing campus resources, and promising practices to create a positive campus environment" (O'Herrin, 2011, p. 16). Approximately only two out of five colleges and universities that serve military students and veterans provide professional development or training opportunities to faculty and staff (Snead & Baridon, 2009/2010).

As evidenced by DiRamio et al. (2008), Livingston et al. (2011), Thomas (2010), Morreale (2011), Rumann (2010), and McDonald's (2011) research studies, there is a need for a greater understanding of the subpopulations of military students. Creating and

designing initiatives, programs, and services specific to military students will encourage a heightened degree of student engagement and academic success among this population. Further research is necessary to learn about all factors that are important to the design and implementation of such programs and services.

Because of the insufficiency of literature surrounding deployed military students, there is a significant need for further research in this area. These students present as a diverse subpopulation. The delineation of this subpopulation has been strengthened by information and insight gained through various forms of data collection, such as focus groups, interviews, and conferences. The information considered in this literature review suggests that there is a considerable need for immediate strategic plans in addition to long-term plans addressing this subpopulation of students.

My qualitative study reflected the need for a greater or more informed understanding of military deployment and how deployment affects active-duty students. The different deployment locations around the world present unique challenges and obstacles; because of this, it is important for colleges and universities to design programs and services that maintain a degree of flexibility. The relevant elements of deployment must be accurately defined, and institutions, faculties, staff, and active-duty service members must work closely with one another to determine a successful course of action for addressing associated needs.

The research studies and this review of literature demonstrate the need for further research into the design and implementation of initiatives, programs, and services designed to meet the needs of deployed military students. These service members face

wide-ranging and, at times, unpredictable experiences; for that reason, there is an increased need for further research and theory in higher education to effectively guide practice and policy. Because of the varied characteristics, transitions, and experiences of deployed military students, there is a significant need for (a) a greater understanding of these students, and (b) establishment of initiatives and policies designed to address needs associated with the different elements of deployment.

Theoretical Frameworks

Schlossberg's Transition Theory. Theorists define the study of psychosocial development as the examination of “the content of development, the important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationships with others, and what to do with their lives” (Gardner, 2009, p. 18). Building on psychosocial development, Schlossberg's primary goal (Schlossberg, 1984) was to develop a theoretical framework that facilitated an understanding of adults in transition (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). This theoretical framework would not only provide an understanding of transitional experiences, but also provide the strategies needed to cope with the “ordinary and extraordinary process of living” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. viii). The focus of Schlossberg's Transition Theory is based on “an examination of what constitutes a transition, different forms of transitions, the transition process, and factors that influence transitions” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 214).

According to Schlossberg (1981), “A transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships” (p. 5). Schlossberg

states that transitions often involve the process of change in routines or assumptions or change in a set of established and familiar roles, such as in relationships and careers (Schlossberg, 2011). For some individuals, a transition process may occur without challenges; others may take years to navigate a transition successfully. To best understand transitions, Schlossberg identified the features common to all transitions and characterized these into four major categories, the 4S System: situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2008). The following discussion defines these four categories and explains how the system is designed to “provide a framework for an individual’s appraisal process” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 216). In this discussion, and elsewhere in this study, the work of certain researchers who have referenced Schlossberg’s system is cited as appropriate, as are Schlossberg’s writings.

The first category in Schlossberg’s 4S System is situation—an individual’s circumstances at the time of a transition (Schlossberg, 2011). The factors that are considered important when examining a situation are trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experiences with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessment (Evans et al., 2010). Goodman et al. (2006) define these factors as follows:

- Trigger—What precipitated the transition?
- Timing—How does the transition relate to one’s social clock?
- Control—What aspects of the transition can one control?
- Role change—Does the transition involve role change?
- Duration—Is the transition seen as permanent or temporary?
- Previous experience with a similar transition—How has the individual met similar transitions?
- Concurrent stress—What and how great are the stresses facing the individual now, if any?
- Assessment—Does the individual view the situation positively, negatively, or as benign? (pp. 60)

At the time of a transition, if a person is experiencing other stressors, coping with the transition may be increasingly challenging. On the other hand, if an individual's situation is balanced and free from additional stressors, the person is more likely to adapt better to the transition.

Personal and demographic characteristics, as well as psychological resources, are important factors to consider in connection with Schlossberg's second category of the 4S System, the self (Evans et al., 2010). According to Evans et al. (2010), an individual's life perspective typically is affected by personal and demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, age, gender, stage of life and health, and ethnicity and culture (p. 217). As compared to personal and demographic characteristics, Evans et al. (2010) define and categorize psychological resources as coping strategies, outlook (specifically, optimism and self-efficacy), commitment and values, and spirituality and resiliency. Personal and demographic characteristics, along with psychological resources, determine an individual's inner strength for coping with the transition and situation (Schlossberg, 2011).

The third category of the 4S System is support. According to Schlossberg (2011), "The support available at the time of transition is critical to one's sense of well-being" (p. 160). In the 4S System, there are four specific types of social support: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities (Evans et al., 2010; Goodman et al., 2006). Schlossberg states that a strong support system often positively influences an individual's emotional and physical well-being, thereby influencing the transition experience and an individual's overall ability to adapt. Strong

support systems result in an individual's ability to integrate the transition into his or her life, as opposed to being solely preoccupied with the transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

The final category of Schlossberg's 4S System for coping with transitions is strategies. According to Taylor (1998), coping strategies are the specific behavioral and psychological efforts of individuals to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events. Taylor states, "Two general coping strategies have been distinguished: problem-solving strategies are efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful circumstances, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies involve efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful events" (para. 1). Research suggests that the choice and capacity to employ problem-solving strategies as opposed to emotion-focused strategies is determined largely by the individual's personal style and the type of stressful event. Individuals are more likely to use problem-focused strategies with potential controllable stressors and emotion-focused strategies with stressors that are perceived as less controllable (para. 1).

Deployed military students are a distinct population with needs that differ from those of other student populations. Schlossberg's transition model provides a framework for analyzing any transition (Schlossberg, 2011). The 4S System of Schlossberg's Transition Theory is important to understanding how active-duty service members manage the transition of deployment while enrolled in higher education. By applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory, one can determine whether a deployed service member's individual resources—the situation, self, support, and strategies—are sufficient to support the change or transition (p. 161). If the individual's resources are not

sufficient, understanding Schlossberg's Transition Theory may lend insight in strengthening the individual's resources.

Tinto's framework for institutional action for student success. Influenced by a sociological model, and based on decades of research, Tinto (2012):

argued that the pattern of student retention and graduation, as well as its converse, student attrition, was as much a reflection of the academic and social environments of an institution—and therefore of the institutional actions that established those environments—as was the character of the students enrolled in the institution. (pp. vii-viii)

Speaking with many administrators, faculty, and student-affairs professionals in over four hundred colleges and universities, Tinto created a framework for institutional action – one that describes the types of actions and policies colleges and universities can apply to increase student retention and completion (Tinto, 2012). In this discussion, and elsewhere in this study, the work of certain researchers who have referenced Tinto's is cited as appropriate, as are Tinto's writings.

According to Tinto (2012), "There is little question that higher education pays" (p. 1). What is most important is not simply attending college, but earning a degree—in particular, a bachelor's degree (p. 1). According to Baum, Ma, and Payea (2013), individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to be employed and earn more than others with no college degree or others with some college. In 2011, individuals with bachelor's degrees working full-time earned on average \$56,500 per year, as compared to \$40,400 per year for persons with some college but no degree and \$35,400 for those with only a high school diploma (p. 5). Earning a college degree does not always promise financial security or improved well-being. However, according to Baum et al. (2013),

“The evidence is overwhelming that for most people, education beyond high school is a prerequisite for a secure lifestyle and significantly improved the probabilities of employment and a stable career with a positive earnings trajectory” (p. 7). Earning a college degree provides people with tools and strategies to live healthier and more productive and satisfying lives.

According to Tinto (2012), while there has been success in closing gaps in college accessibility among different socioeconomic levels, there needs to be an increased focus on completion of study programs. Even though there is much documented research in the area of student retention, the research often focuses on “theoretically appealing concepts that may not easily translate into definable courses of action” (p. 5). Tinto (2012) states that much of the research on student retention has not been particularly useful to those wanting to implement programs designed to improve student retention and completion in higher education because much of the research “assumes, incorrectly, that knowing why students leave is equivalent to knowing why students stay and succeed” (p. 5). He also states that assuming that the two processes are mirror images of one another results in fragmented knowledge of effective institutional actions (p. 5).

According to Tinto (2012), despite much research and many years of effort, colleges and universities have yet to design a coherent framework for determining, organizing, and implementing successful student retention services and programs. Often, institutions of higher education invest in a long list of actions, many of which are disconnected from one another, resulting in incohesive or disconnected actions whose sum impact on student retention is less than optimal (p. 5). Tinto’s framework focuses on

a systematic way of thinking about those specific actions that are needed to increase retention and graduation (p. 6). Additionally, Tinto's framework provides colleges and universities with an approach to organizing and implementing those institutional actions or conditions that will enhance their sum impact on student success (p. 6).

A significant element of Tinto's (2012) framework is recognizing that, upon having admitted a student, the college or university has an obligation to take those measures that are necessary to help the student stay and graduate. According to Tinto, to improve rates of retention and graduation, institutions must begin by being self-reflective and focusing on the college or university's current policies, programs, and services or lack thereof and then establish conditions that promote these outcomes (p. 6). Tinto believes that establishing conditions that promote student success will result in long-term improvement in student retention and graduation rates. Research studies have identified four areas or conditions that are associated with student success: expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement (p. 7).

Expectations, the first condition of Tinto's framework, have a powerful effect on student performance and overall student success (Tinto, 2012). According to Tinto (2012), student retention and graduation are positively influenced by clear and consistent expectations that identify requirements for being successful in college. Tinto generally categorizes these expectations into three broad areas: "success in the institution as a whole, success in a program of study, and success in a course in which the student is enrolled" (p. 10). As said by Tinto, addressing expectations for how to be successful in college occurs both concretely and in more general approaches. Orientation activities,

program advising, individual faculty and staff advising, interactions with faculty, and coursework can each address student expectations concretely or pointedly (p. 10). Less concrete or more general approaches to addressing expectations may include informal advising or mentoring, as well as informal networks such as student contact with faculty and staff and student peer groups (p. 10). To be most successful in college and to graduate, students must not only be aware of but also clearly understand the rules, regulations, and requirements for degree completion.

Tinto's (2012) second condition is support. According to Tinto, defining and identifying student expectations is essential to student success, but providing students with the support needed to meet expectations is equally important (p. 24). Tinto also states that there is nothing more important or influential to student success than academic support (p. 25). One area of academic support that is significant to student retention is support in the classroom. Academic support aligned with the college classroom provides the opportunity for support to be contextualized to learning in specific courses (p. 26). Tinto believes that academic support often results in early success in college classes, and early success increases the likelihood of success in future classes. Social support is also important to a student's successful navigation of college and degree completion. Internal and external social forces directly and indirectly influence students' sense of connection and involvement in the social communities of the college or university (p. 27). Academic and social support resulting from interaction with faculty, staff, and student peers is likely to contribute to a student's self-esteem and self-confidence, thereby increasing the likelihood of retention and successful degree completion.

Assessment and feedback are the third condition of Tinto's (2012) framework. According to Tinto, students are more likely to succeed in colleges and universities that assess their performance and offer detailed and consistent feedback in approaches that allow for students, faculty, and staff alike to adjust their behavior to encourage heightened student success (Tinto, 2012). Furthermore, Tinto states, an environment that is rich in student assessment and feedback provides the opportunity for students to be more actively involved in learning activities, in addition to being more effective in the self-assessment of their learning strategies and study habits (p. 54). Many times, higher education presents academic and social demands that may be unfamiliar to students; therefore, timely and thorough assessment and feedback are essential for effective behaviors and student success.

Tinto's fourth condition is involvement (Tinto, 2012). According to Tinto (2012), involvement (also known as "student engagement") is perhaps the most important condition of all institutional actions. Even though academic and social involvement are conceptually distinct, Tinto states, these two types of involvement often influence and overlap one another (p. 65). When students think of involvement as academically or socially relevant or related to their interests, they are more likely to become engaged (p. 67). Colleges and universities that understand the importance of student involvement are better able to determine different forms of academic and social engagement that increase levels of connectedness and participation among all students. Identifying and providing students with opportunities for increased engagement in meaningful learning activities and social gatherings result in greater student retention and graduation.

Tinto's (2012) framework for institutional action for student success offers colleges and universities insight into greater student retention and graduation. Although the framework is significant for gaining a greater understanding of those factors affecting overall student success, the framework does not diminish the importance of student responsibility:

No actions will ensure the success of students who are themselves unwilling to expend the effort needed to succeed in college. By the same token, student effort may prove futile in settings that are not conducive to success. In admitting a student, a college enters into a contract – indeed, takes on a moral obligation – to establish those conditions on campus, especially in the classroom, that enhance the likelihood that students who are willing to expend the effort will succeed. (Tinto, 2012, p. 120)

Chapter 3

Research Methods

Deployments present differing challenges, depending on the installation or type of base, threat assessment, and terrorist threat level; therefore, certain degrees of flexibility in the design of initiatives, policies, and programs addressing the particular needs of deployed military students may be necessary. As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research study was to identify gaps in understanding of the specialized educational needs of active-duty or deployed military service members enrolled in higher education and to develop new insights and knowledge that may be helpful to college and university administrators, faculty, and staff in designing and implementing initiatives, strategic plans, and resources to address these needs most effectively.

Assumptions of Qualitative and Quantitative Research

According to Stake (2010), elements of quantitative and qualitative scientific inquiry and research are evident in all divisions of science. However, as illustrated throughout the 20th century, researchers often are divided philosophically between the two approaches, focusing on their differences and thus potentially failing to recognize that each maintains a purpose in scientific research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Understanding the definitions and characteristics of and differences between a qualitative and a quantitative approach to scientific research was significant to determining the methodological approach for this study.

As defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005),

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible.

These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are experientially focused, seeking to understand how individuals interpret, construct, and apply meaning to their experiences. Merriam states that qualitative research aims to achieve an in-depth understanding and meaning of participants' experiences as articulated or defined by the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's perspectives (p. 14). Both a significant and perhaps an advantageous characteristic of qualitative research is the instrumentation.

As said by Merriam (2009), the researcher is the "primary instrument for data collection and analysis" in a qualitative research approach (p. 15). As the human instrument in qualitative research, Merriam states, the researcher is able to be both responsive and adaptive in processing information, clarifying data, and ensuring appropriate understanding and accuracy of interpretation of data (p. 15). Another significant characteristic of qualitative research for Merriam is the use of descriptive language (p. 16). In qualitative research, understanding the meaning of the participants' experiences often leads to highly descriptive language throughout the inquiry and, thus, the final product.

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), quantitative research uses "the techniques associated with the gathering, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of numerical information" (p. 5). This research, they say, is driven by theory and the

current state of knowledge about the phenomena that are being studied or researched (p. 23). Quantitative researchers approach a study with deductive logic, reasoning from the general to the particular (p. 23). As stated by Stake (2010), to determine whether a cause-and-effect relationship or correlation exists among variables, the quantitative research approach “relies heavily on linear attributes, measurements, and statistical analysis” (p. 11). In contrast to qualitative research, according to Miller (2000), a quantitative researcher does not seek meaning in the participants’ perspectives, as the data in a quantitative inquiry are independent of the participants’ perceptions. Another distinct difference between the quantitative and qualitative approaches is the instrumentation. As compared to human instrumentation in a qualitative study, the instrumentation in quantitative research is predetermined through the use of tests, surveys, and questionnaires, for example.

Rationale for Choosing a Qualitative Approach

In learning of the characteristics and differences between qualitative and quantitative research, I found significance in appreciating both philosophies and recognized that there is a place for both approaches in scientific thinking and research. After careful consideration, I chose to use a qualitative approach—specifically, a case study—in the methodology design of this research study. Understanding the history and strengths of qualitative research was important to my decision. The history of qualitative research “is extensive, drawing from the evolving curiosities of humankind over the centuries, formally disciplined by ethnographers, social psychologists, historians, and literary critics” (Stake, 1995, p. 35). Qualitative researchers seek to understand the

“complex interrelationships among all that exists” (p. 37). I approached this study using inductive logic and reasoning from particular facts or data to general principles or themes as discussed by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009). Through the use of rich thick description, my goal was to establish an empathetic understanding in the reader, described by Teddlie and Tashakkori as “an understanding that important human actions are seldom simply caused and usually not caused in ways that can be discovered” (p. 39). In this study, I sought to understand research problems within a holistic, empirical, and interpretive approach (p. 47).

By choosing to follow a case study design, I was able to research the “particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). My goals or expectations of the case study were to identify and capture the complexity of circumstances of active-duty military students enrolled in higher education in the face of deployment. In keeping with Merriam’s (2009) guidance, I served as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in this qualitative case study, searching for meaning and understanding through an inductive strategy, which resulted in a richly descriptive end product.

Central Question and Research Questions

According to Stake (1995), as qualitative researchers, “we enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they [the participants] function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn” (p. 1). Researchers become engaged in a case study, studying the different elements of a system and seeking greater understanding and insight. Stake states that the case study is

often thought of as a bounded system and integrated system—a system that is illustrative of purposes, albeit, at times, irrational purposes (p. 2). Perhaps one of the most important, yet difficult, aspects of qualitative research is to design research questions—“research questions that will direct the looking and the thinking enough and not too much” (p. 15). As discussed by Stake (1995), research questions must be designed to capture different elements to include conceptual organization, a need for understanding, theoretical or conceptual bridges of known information, cognitive structures that guide data collection, and outlines that allow the interpretations to be presented to others.

The purpose of a qualitative case study was to gain a greater understanding of the uniqueness and complexity of the case; therefore, well-designed research questions are significant to the case study as they “sharpen the focus, minimizing the interest in the situation and circumstance” (Stake, 1995, p. 16). A central question driving this research study was to understand how active-duty military students who had experienced deployment described their pursuit of higher education. As stated in Chapter 1, the following research questions were used to guide this study:

- What are the motivations or reasons why active-duty military service members pursue higher education while deployed?
- How do military students who have experienced deployment describe their educational pursuits?
- What challenges or stressors do active-duty military students face while deployed?

- What types of support do active-duty military students receive from college or university administrators, faculty, and military educational services?
- What types of support do active-duty military students receive from higher-ranking military personnel?

Participants and Settings

The sample in this qualitative case study was a purposeful sample. According to Merriam (2009), a purposeful sample is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). I selected the participants based on the individuals’ ability to “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Purposeful sampling often results in information-rich cases, giving the researcher the opportunity to gain considerable knowledge about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study (p. 77).

In this research study, participants were recruited from a Military-Veteran Services Center within a Midwestern university. Although a feature of that university, the Military-Veterans Services Center offers resources and services to all military personnel, the veterans and service members who use its services do not need to be enrolled in this specific university or any institution of higher education. For participant recruitment, I discussed the importance and relevance of this study with the university administration and the Director of Military-Veteran Services at the identified university site. With the permission of the university administration and the Director of Military-

Veteran Services, I sent an email (Appendix D) to all military personnel who had signed a Consent to be Contacted for Research Projects form (Appendix A) through the Military-Veteran Services Center. The email briefly explained the purpose of the study and provided a link to complete a brief survey (Appendix F) via SurveyMonkey. From the survey responses, I identified and, following a phone script (Appendix G), telephoned service members who met the research guidelines for this study and who were interested and willing to be interviewed. The sample consisted of 10 male participants—nine enlisted men and one officer—all of whom are or were at one time active-duty military personnel serving in the U.S. Army or Air Force. All participants had been enrolled in higher education while on active duty and deployed outside the continental U.S. within the last 5 years. All data and responses from individuals who were not selected for interviews were deleted through SurveyMonkey and not used in the results.

Data Collection

According to Stake (1995), “There is no particular moment when data gathering begins. It begins before there is commitment to do the study; backgrounding, acquaintance with other cases, first impressions” (p. 49). Stake states that a primary element of data collection in case studies is becoming acquainted with the case, and much of this preliminary data is impressionistic (p. 49). Through experience, the researcher learns to refine and replace the early impressionistic data of the case study with more meaningful interpretations and conclusions. Great privilege and obligation are important to all researchers, “the privilege to pay attention to what they consider worthy of attention and the obligation to make conclusions drawn from those choices meaningful to

colleagues and clients” (p. 49). As discussed by Stake (1995), one of the most important qualifications of qualitative researchers is experience: “the experience of the qualitative researcher is one knowing what leads to significant understanding, recognizing good sources of data and consciously and unconsciously testing out the veracity of their eyes and robustness of their interpretations” (p. 50).

Before collecting data, I completed and submitted a research plan to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The data collection method for this case study included face-to-face, semi-structured interviews consisting of specific demographic and open-ended questions. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln transcribed the interviews according to all IRB guidelines. Prior to the interview, each participant received an informed consent form (Appendix B) that detailed the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks and discomforts, benefits, compensation, and discussed the voluntary and confidentiality elements of the study. The participants understood that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

The interviews followed an interview protocol consisting of the introductory statement, interview questions, and the closing statement (Appendix C). The introductory statement identified the purpose of the research study and offered the participant an opportunity to ask questions before continuing with the interview. The interview questions included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, resulting in a semi-structured interview. To improve the quality of data that would be collected, the

interview questions were clear and relevant to the participants being interviewed. The closing statement discussed the value of the participant's responses and thanked him for the interview.

Data Analysis

Similar to the process of data collection, according to Stake (1995), there is “no particular moment when data analysis begins” (p. 71). The process of data analysis can many times blend with the data collection. The early data are often impressionistic and must be refined through data analysis. As said by Stake, “Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (p. 71). Through analysis, impressions and observations are taken apart, giving meaning to the different parts (p. 71). Data analysis provides an opportunity for interpretations that are significant to understanding the case study.

With the permission of each participant, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes. As Creswell (2013) discussed, “the process of coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in the study, and then assigning a label to the code” (p. 184). I analyzed the aggregated codes from the transcriptions, and, through a systematic process informed by the purpose of the study, the orientation and knowledge of the researcher, and the meanings made known by the participants, the codes were reduced into themes, in alignment with guidance set forth by Merriam (2009). Once the codes had been defined and labeled, I evaluated and reevaluated them,

aggregating them to form common ideas resulting in themes. The themes are discussed in Chapter 4, Presentation of Data, and Chapter 5, Significance of Findings.

Verification Procedures

According to Creswell (2013), “Qualitative researchers strive for understanding, that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, spending excessive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings” (p. 243). Evaluation and validation of the data are important to document the accuracy of information. The verification procedures used in this study, to use Creswell’s descriptors, were rich, thick description; member checking; and an external audit (p. 252).

Rich, thick description. According to Stake (2010), a description can be defined as rich if it provides abundant and interconnected details. Stake states that a thick description “offers direct connection to cultural theory and scientific knowledge” (p. 49). According to Creswell (2013), “Rich, thick description allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study” (p. 252). Detailed description of the data provide any evidence of shared characteristics, thus allowing readers to determine whether the findings can be transferred to other settings. The richness of this research study is illustrated in the direct quotes of the participants in Chapter 4, Presentation of Data.

Member checking. Member checking allows the researcher to ask for the participants’ understanding or views of the credibility of the interpretations and findings (Creswell, 2013). Creswell states that member checking requires the researcher to take

the findings back to the research participants so that they may be able to judge the accuracy and credibility of the data analysis, interpretations, and conclusions (p. 252). Although data analysis is subject to the researcher's interpretation, according to Merriam (2009), "participants should be able to recognize their experiences in your interpretations or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives" (p. 217). I offered a preliminary analysis of the data to several study participants after their interviews were finished, to ensure that the interpretations of their experiences were correct. The information that I reviewed with them was similar to the results of pilot studies that I had conducted in previous research classes on this topic. This, I believe, contributed to my ability to lead the discussions with ease and understanding, and I sensed that this ease and understanding made the participants more comfortable. I also believe that my being both a spouse of an active-duty service member who has experienced deployments and an educator in higher education enhanced the sense of trustworthiness and understanding between the participants and me. Participants' responses during these further conversations reinforced the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations and conclusions.

External audit. According to Creswell (2013), involving an external auditor allows for an external check of the research process by ensuring that the process is being executed correctly. Creswell states that an auditor asks the researcher insightful questions about the research methods and about the meanings and interpretations that the researcher has given (p. 251). I recruited an external auditor to complete a

methodological audit (Appendix J) throughout this qualitative study. The audit procedure consisted of the following steps:

1. Review of transcriptions, participant quotes, and initial open-coding procedures
2. Review of emerging codes and themes
3. Reading of the final draft of the completed dissertation
4. Signing and completing audit attestation

The external audit allowed for review and debriefing of the research study at different points throughout the process.

The Role of the Researcher

According to Merriam (2009), in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Merriam states that inductive logic or reasoning from detailed facts or data to more general principles or themes is important in qualitative research; yet, although important, inductive logic may not be without biases or subjectivities (p. 15). Identifying any potential biases and subjectivities is significant to a qualitative research study. Rather than eliminating identified biases or subjectivities, it is important to determine how they may be influencing or shaping the collection and interpretation of data and, therefore, how they can be managed (p. 15).

As discussed by Greenbank (2003), a “complex interaction of the researcher’s moral, competency, personal and social values have an important influence on the research process” (p. 798). Greenbank states that values almost always have impacts on qualitative research; because of this, qualitative research methods cannot be value-free in

their application (p. 798). Although a value-neutral approach may be ideal in the research process, it is often not achievable in qualitative research. Rather than focusing on trying to achieve a value-neutral approach, it is important to attempt to bracket values and use rigorous research methods, including verification procedures (p. 798).

To effectively collect data, interpret the data, and provide a study that was richly described in a way consistent with qualitative research, I first had to understand my role as researcher and the potential biases or subjectivities that I might have with reference to the phenomena of my study. My husband is active-duty military, and, throughout his 22-year military career, he has been enrolled in higher education while deployed. In addition, I have taught in higher education for 9 years. Having had conversations with my husband and other active-duty military students about higher education in the face of deployment, I believed that this was a relevant and important topic to research.

After researching other studies, I identified a lack of research on deployed service members enrolled in colleges and universities. Although I had some understanding of these students, my understanding was limited, validating the need for further research. I approached this research study with a genuine interest in gaining the trust of the participants and understanding, following Merriam's advice, the "phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives" rather than from my experiences, biases, or subjectivities (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). My goals, following Merriam, were to actively listen to and achieve an understanding of the participants' experiences and, through interpretation, to present a product of a qualitative inquiry that was richly descriptive (p. 16).

Ethical Considerations

In any type of research, there is potential for ethical issues to arise. According to Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2001), when ethical issues become known, “the protection of human subjects or participants in any research is imperative” (p. 93). Orb et al. stated that, in addressing ethical issues, the researcher must adhere to certain well-established principles, including autonomy, beneficence, and justice (p. 95). As discussed by Creswell (2013), it is important to think about and examine potential ethical issues as they apply to the different phases of the qualitative research process. Prior to conducting this study, I sought and was granted IRB approval from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I also received permission from the university administration to include the Director of Military-Veteran Services at the identified university site to recruit military service members who had previously signed a consent form to be contacted for research projects (Appendix A). I provided each participant with an informed consent form detailing the purpose of the study, the freedom to choose to participate or to withdraw from the study, and the anonymity and confidentiality of the study (Appendix B).

All interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable office at the Military-Veteran Services Center at the identified university site. All information and data collected in this study were kept strictly confidential and stored in a secure location in the researcher’s office. Following all IRB guidelines, the interview transcriptions were completed by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Once the interview transcriptions had been completed, the audio recordings were erased.

Throughout the research study, the participants were able to contact me at any time with questions or concerns.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Data

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a greater understanding of experiences and transitions that pose distinct challenges for active-duty and deployed military personnel enrolled in higher education, but that non-military students do not encounter. A central question driving this research study was to understand how active-duty military students who had experienced deployment described their pursuit of higher education. To gain that information, a survey was conducted, using a purposeful sample of 10 service members who had experienced deployment in the U.S. military while enrolled in an institution of higher learning. All ten participants were male—nine Air Force service members and one Army service member. Moreover, the participant sample comprised nine enlisted military personnel and one officer.

All participants were interviewed, and, prior to the interview, each received an informed-consent form that detailed the purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits, compensation, and voluntary and confidentiality elements of this study. The participants understood that they would be able to ask questions or withdraw from the study at any time throughout the interview without consequences. Documents used in connection with the study are presented in appendices as follows:

- Appendix A Consent to be Contacted for Research Projects
- Appendix B Informed Consent Form
- Appendix C Interview Protocol
- Appendix D Survey Email
- Appendix E Survey Consent Form

- Appendix F Survey
- Appendix G Phone Script

As discussed in Chapter 3, Research Methods, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes. Then the aggregated codes from the transcriptions were analyzed and reduced into themes. This chapter provides brief profiles of the participants, summarizes the interview data, and discusses the results of the data analysis in connection with each of the four themes that were derived.

Participant Profiles

To better understand the findings of this research study, it is important to learn about the background of each participant. The participant profiles in this section briefly describe the participants' (a) reasons for joining the military, (b) reasons for pursuing higher education while serving on active duty, and (c) factors considered when choosing a major. Any identifiable information about the participants has been changed or omitted. The participants' demographic data was summarized in Appendix H.

Participant 1. Participant 1, an enlisted service member, is currently serving on active duty in the Air Force. He has been in the Air Force for 6 years, and his current grade is E-4, Senior Airman, SrA. His current and most recent duty title is Aerospace Propulsion Specialist. Participant 1 is an undergraduate student nearing completion of a bachelor's degree in business management with an emphasis on project management. He joined the Air Force primarily for the educational opportunities that the military affords to service members. Participant 1 felt that the military approach is more focused in offering educational benefits such as tuition assistance, compared with other financial approaches such as federal student loans. He said that the military will:

give you money to go ahead and take classes, but if you don't utilize that money the way they expect you to, you're going to be paying that money back. And that's a lot more incentive than "here's a bunch of money from student loans; do what you want with it."

In the interview, Participant 1 was asked why he decided to pursue higher education while on active duty:

when I joined the military, I didn't view it as my career. I viewed it more as a stepping stone to my career. Having military experience on a résumé plus a degree will take you a lot farther than just going to a 4-year college, so that was definitely, definitely a huge motivation when it came to pursuing more education.

When choosing his major, Participant 1's main motivation was to choose a major that provided opportunity to learn leadership and management:

I don't see myself as somebody who will just be taking orders my whole life. I want to be in charge with the minimal amount of people above me. So, it was definitely a management type of career field that I wanted to get into, and I know how important project management is for businesses.

Participant 2. Participant 2 has served on active duty in the Air Force for 7 years. He is enlisted, and his current grade is E-5, Staff Sergeant, SSgt. While serving on active duty, Participant 2 completed his bachelor's degree in computer information systems, began his master's degree, and attempted to complete a certification. When asked about his reasons for joining the military, Participant 2 stated:

when I was in high school I was in the JROTC, doing the color guard, and we participated in some Veterans Day's ceremonies. Every generation of my family has served in the military at some point in every war. I was in college and I was almost done, but I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I thought about what I was most proud of, and I thought back to when I was in the high school ROTC. I had a lot of people coming up and shaking my hand, thanking me, I wasn't even active duty, I was just in high school. . . . I wanted to do something I was proud of. . . .

Participant 2 explained why he had decided to pursue higher education while serving on active duty. While he discussed the incentives and benefits of tuition

assistance given by the military, Participant 2 explained that his leading influence for pursuing higher education while serving on active duty was his family's emphasis on and history of education:

The reason to pursue my bachelor's degree was because my dad has a master's degree, and my whole family said you need to get your bachelor's degree—it's just something you need to do—it was just, it was family . . . driven.

When determining his major, Participant 2 heavily considered his interests and experiences as well as his career field once he would separate from the military. He chose computer information systems to allow for the study of information technology, computers, and databases, while at the same time incorporating areas of project management:

computer information systems was just kind of all-encompassing, jack of all trades but really master of none, which is what I'm going to be doing when I get out of the Air Force. I'm excited about that—it takes all of my interests and puts them together.

Participant 3. As an enlisted service member, Participant 3 served on active duty in the Air Force for 6 years, as a security forces Airman specializing in law enforcement. He is separated from the military, with a current grade of E-4, Senior Airman, SrA. While serving on active duty, Participant 3 completed his bachelor's degree in business administration. In the interview, he was asked to describe his primary reason for joining the military; his response was focused on the tragedy of September 11, 2001. "I was—I was pretty upset when 9/11 happened. I was a junior in high school. I joined because I was pissed off about September 11th."

Further into the interview, Participant 3 talked about why he decided to pursue higher education while serving on active duty:

I saw the difference between the officers and the enlisted, and just how—how much better their lives were, how much more money they made, how much better the cars they drove were, and I thought, “You know, these guys aren’t any smarter than I am. I want the lives they have, and I want the money they have. And so, if all that is standing between the officers and me is a few more years of school, I’ll do that. And if the military’s going to pay for it, I’m silly to not take advantage of those benefits.”

In thinking about choosing a major, Participant 3 first considered his career in the Air Force:

I was military police, and so I thought, “Well, it’s natural that I’d pursue a criminal justice degree program.” And I quickly found out that if you hold a gun for a living that you’re going to be asked to use it. So . . . upon completing my associate’s degree, I switched to business administration, and I earned my bachelor’s degree in business administration.

Participant 4. Participant 4 served in the Air Force as a Crew Chief mechanic for fighter aircraft for 24 years. He was an enlisted service member and is now retired from the military, with a current grade of E-6, Technical Sergeant, TSgt. While serving on active duty, Participant 4 pursued his associate’s degree but—due to various deployments—was unable to complete his degree. Since retiring from the military, Participant 4 has earned his bachelor’s degree in cybersecurity.

When asked about his reasons for joining the military, Participant 4 discussed the importance of his family history in the military. Participant 4’s family has:

been serving this country, protecting this country and the freedoms since the American Revolutionary War. My father was in the Naval Special Forces in Vietnam. I’ve had a great uncle that flew B-17s in Europe during World War II, and another cousin, flew A-7, Navy A-7s, A-4s, and a few F-4s during Vietnam. My dad was also a member of the Nebraska International Guard, Weekend Warrior. He was a jet engine mechanic on the RF-4s. I loved aircraft so every chance I had, I went to the weekend drills with my dad and watched him work on aircraft. I didn’t know if I wanted to go to college, join the International Guard, or serve active duty, so I just worked two jobs. I thought about it and had more of a feeling that . . . I needed join, to serve active duty. . . .

Following his discussion of reasons for joining the military, Participant 4 was asked to describe why he had made a decision to pursue higher education while serving on active duty. He stated:

I wanted more education. I was hoping to become a Senior Master Sergeant, an E-8, and you need to have at least an associate's degree for this rank. I wanted to stay in the Air Force as long as I could.

While serving on active duty, Participant 4 majored in aircraft maintenance. His educational goal was to graduate with an aircraft or a maintenance background degree to align with his many years of military aircraft and maintenance experience.

Participant 5. Participant 5 has served in two branches of the military—previously, the Air Force, and currently, the Army Reserves. Participant 5 served in the Air Force for 4 years and separated as an E-4, Senior Airman, SrA. While serving in the Air Force, he received an athletic scholarship to play college basketball; because of this, he separated from the Air Force. Once he had fulfilled his athletic scholarship, Participant 5 joined the Army Reserves; he holds a grade of E-5, Sergeant, SGT. His most recent duty title is All Source Intelligence Analysis. For the purpose of this research study, the focus is on Participant 5's call to active duty while serving in the Army Reserves. During that time, Participant 5 worked towards his bachelor's degree in legal studies.

In the interview, Participant 5 described his reasons for joining the military. Although he initially joined the Air Force primarily for the educational benefits, he later joined the Army Reserves for more patriotic reasons:

Initially, for the first time, it was really for college money. I did that for . . . almost 4 years—I actually got out on an athletic scholarship, I played ball for

3 years. So, that was the initial time, but the second time was for more patriotic reasons. I worked for the federal government at the time, as well as training people in explosives, so it was more patriotic the second time.

Participant 5 pursued his bachelor's degree while serving on active duty because of the educational opportunities that the military presented, especially tuition assistance. To determine his major in legal studies, Participant 5 first greatly considered his family history and experiences of working in law enforcement and then chose to major in criminal justice. However, while serving on active duty in Iraq, Participant 5 determined that he was more interested in policy and politics than in criminal justice. He changed his major to legal studies:

Primarily, it was criminal justice because my father was 30-something years law enforcement. Everybody in my family is law enforcement—federal, county, and city—so that influenced me. I decided to do a little bit more digging as to what I was interested in, and then I was like . . . “I’m more into politics and policy. . . .” so I switched gears, probably when I was in the Army Reserves.

Participant 6. Participant 6, an enlisted service member, has served on active duty in the Air Force for 14 years and currently holds a grade of E-7, Master Sergeant, MSgt. His most recent duty title is Aircraft Production Superintendent. While serving on active duty, Participant 6 completed his bachelor's degree in professional aeronautics with a minor in management and safety. Upon graduating from high school, Participant 6 had planned to work on his family's farm; however, he said, “in the late 90's, the farming just went completely under, there was no money to be had.” Because of the state of the farming industry at that time, Participant 6 felt that joining the military was his best option for a productive and industrious career.

In the interview, Participant 6 described his reasons for pursuing higher education while serving on active duty. Early in his military career, Participant 6 learned that education is heavily considered for promotion in both career and rank or grade; therefore, while active duty, he completed his associate's degree. Although he had earned his associate's degree, he understood the significance of and opportunities presented by earning a bachelor's degree. While working in a position of testing and development, Participant 6 worked with other professionals who discussed with him the importance of earning a bachelor's degree in order to be promoted:

You need to get your education so you can become a pro-rep manager someday. . . . You're going to bottom out if you keep your associate's. You're going to only get so far, and there's no room for growth unless you have your bachelor's.

Participant 6 soon transferred from his position as a testing and development specialist into a command-directed instructor position teaching various aviation systems. In his experiences as an instructor, Participant 6 completed several classes and was able to transfer these classes to a bachelor's degree program in professional aeronautics. His primary reason for choosing a major in professional aeronautics was to align his bachelor's degree with his military career.

Participant 7. Participant 7 served as an enlisted military personnel in the Air Force for 20 years. He retired from the military as a Superintendent, Chaplain Operations, with a grade of E-7, Master Sergeant, MSgt. When asked why he had joined the military, he discussed his mother's educational background and his father's military experiences as the most influential factors considered in his decision to join the military:

My mother is a retired third-grade teacher. She taught for 30 years in upstate New York, and she instilled the importance of education. My father is an Army veteran. He was a drafted Korean War veteran, back in the early '50s, and so I always had a fascination with military service and history. I had friends that joined services, so instead of going to college, it was my natural step to join the military, and at least do a tour. I didn't know I was going to stay in and do it for 20 years, but at the time, I wanted to at least serve and do my time.

While serving on active duty, Participant 7 completed his bachelor's degree in library science. Participant 7 explained why he had pursued higher education while serving on active duty. He said that earning a bachelor's degree was one of three major goals he had set for himself during his career in the Air Force:

I wanted to travel and see the world, do things, and serve . . . I wanted to be a senior NCO (non-commissioned officer). Those were my three things, make Master Sergeant, which is a senior NCO, get my degree, and do 20 years, enough to have retirement and earn benefits. I have managed to do all three.

When asked about the factors he had considered when choosing his major, Participant 7 stated:

I originally started going to school for criminal justice because I was thinking about being a cop, and I decided I didn't want to do that. Then I was looking at business because in my military job, a big part of my job was management. A lot of people that I served with were getting their degrees in business because it correlated with their job. I just decided I didn't like business at all . . . when I was stationed in Turkey, my wife had a job at the library. I love libraries. I love books . . . so I enrolled in it [library science].

Participant 8. Participant 8 is an enlisted Aircraft Crew Chief serving on active duty in the Air Force. He has been serving for 4 years and holds the grade of E-5, Staff Sergeant, SSgt. Participant 8 is currently pursuing his master's degree in justice administration and crime management. Prior to joining the military, Participant 8 earned his bachelor's degree in administrative leadership. In the interview, Participant 8

described his reasoning for joining the military. He stated that his goal was to work in federal law enforcement, and, although he had earned his bachelor's degree:

everywhere I went, they [federal law enforcement agencies] wanted a specific degree or military experience, so I . . . joined the military. Now, through multiple degrees and military experience, I feel I have a better opportunity of being selected.

For Participant 8, gaining military experience was significant to finding the career of his choice; however, while military experience was important, so too, was pursuing additional higher education. Participant 8 described his reasons for pursuing further education while serving on active duty:

Well, my family, we've come from a very educated background. Right now, I'm the only one in my family who doesn't have a master's degree, so that was kind of a pressure on me to continue to pursue my degree. It was also one of my personal goals to get a master's degree. I knew that I needed to raise my GPA, so I went back to school. I earned a higher combined GPA, above a 3.0, and now I'm working for my master's. I decided to go back just so I could set myself above my peers.

When choosing his major for his master's degree, Participant 8 wanted to align his career goals with his education and military experiences:

The Air Force actually has an investigative branch called the Office of Special Investigation. If I were to stay in the military, that is the route I would want to go. If they [Office of Special Investigation] are not recruiting or if I can't get a job, then I'll transition out of the military and try to get a civilian federal job.

Participant 9. Participant 9, an Aircraft Maintenance Officer, is serving on active duty in the Air Force. He has been in the Air Force for 2 years, and his current grade is an O-2, 1st Lieutenant, 1st Lt. Participant 9 completed his bachelor's degree prior to joining the military. While serving on active duty, he is pursuing his master's degree

in international security and intelligence studies. Participant 9 offered several reasons why he had joined the military:

I joined the military to serve our country. I also wanted to travel. I'm from a small town . . . and joining the military gave me that opportunity to do that [travel]. I also joined for the educational benefits.

Participant 9 described the factors that had influenced him most when making the decision to pursue higher education while serving on active duty:

Due to my rank, I had to have a bachelor's degree, and to continue my career, I have to earn my master's . . . I've started my master's degree early, just so I could get it done by the time I hit my major board.

Additionally, Participant 9 stated that earning a master's degree is "not necessarily a required item; earning a master's degree makes you more competitive. To make Major, which is two ranks from me, I'll need to have that knocked out."

Participant 10. Participant 10, an enlisted service member, has served on active duty in the Air Force for almost 20 years. He holds a grade of E-7, Master Sergeant, MSgt, and his current duty title is Aircraft Production Superintendent. While serving on active duty in the Air Force, Participant 10 earned his bachelor's degree in professional aeronautics. When asked why he had joined the military, Participant 10 stated:

I wanted to do something better for myself. I went to a junior college to take my basics, my first two years of classes . . . when I started going to college, I was going to school to become a nurse. I spent a day with a nurse, and that's all it took to make me change my mind and decide, "I don't think that I'm going to do that." After that, I was like, "Well, I'll still keep going to school because I'm going to need the basics anyway." So, I did that. Then, my best friend had decided to join the Air Force. He started talking to me about it, and I got to really thinking about it. Even though I was going to college, I didn't really, really know what I wanted to do with the rest of my life, and so one day, I went down to the recruiter, and I signed up.

Participant 10 was asked why he had made a decision to pursue higher education while serving on active duty. He said that earning a bachelor's degree:

proves that you're really invested in your career in the military, and that you are going to school to learn new things or to build upon the fundamentals and knowledge that you already have. It's to make you better in your career, in the job that you're already doing in the military. It just looks really good.

When choosing his major, Participant 10 aligned his military aircraft maintenance career with his educational goals, pursuing "pilot training and aviation-related courses of study."

Summary of Interview Data

The central question driving this study was to understand how deployed active duty military students described their pursuit of higher education. The discussion of interview data in this section answers that question in a summary approach.

Research questions. As indicated in Chapters 1 and 3, the following research questions guided this study:

- What are the motivations or reasons why active-duty military service members pursue higher education while deployed?
- How do active-duty military students who have experienced deployment describe their educational pursuits?
- What challenges or stressors do active-duty military students face while deployed?
- What types of support do active-duty military students receive from college or university administrators, faculty, and military educational services?

- What types of support do active-duty military students receive from higher-ranking military personnel?

Throughout the interviews, each participant discussed various challenges to pursuing higher education while serving on active duty and being deployed, in addition to the importance of personal responsibility and being proactive. In the data analysis, aggregated codes from transcriptions of the interviews conducted to address the research questions were used in formulating four main themes to characterize the content of these discussions (see Appendix I):

- Challenges to pursuing higher education while on deployment
- Internet-related challenges to completing coursework while on deployment
- Challenges to focus and concentration while on deployment
- Proactiveness and responsibility of service members

The following discussions of themes and subthemes detail these challenges and responsibilities based on interview results and provide further insight into the challenges that deployed military students enrolled in higher education face.

Challenges to Pursuing Higher Education While on Deployment

Significant challenges to pursuing higher education while being deployed, as discussed by the participants, were associated with the mission being top priority, with short- or no-notice deployments, and with living conditions specific to the deployments.

Mission first. For U.S. military service members, the mission is always the first priority. Participant 4 said, “If you were in college, taking classes, you had to put that on the back burner. If you had plans to take a trip with your family, that went on the back

burner. The mission comes first in the military.” Participant 3 stated that, while he had been stationed in a combat zone, “The leadership didn’t care. My chain of command was focused on the mission; we’re not here to go to school, we’re here to finish the [mission]—I totally understand that. . . .” Participant 4 also described mission as top priority:

the mission comes first. You have to dwell on the mission. You have to complete the mission . . . everything else is put on the back burner, and when you have time, you have to go and try to find the computers that work, so you can do your online classes.

Without hesitation, Participant 5 said that the mission is always the priority. He discussed the importance, while deployed to a war zone, of focusing on and carrying out the mission and how thoughts of anything else, including his family, were often overshadowed:

You just had to—it’s almost like you have to shut off a lot of that stuff because if you start thinking about what’s going on—you know, back home—it’s going to take your mind off of what you need to be doing. You need to focus on the mission and focus on your own safety, so, I mean—it’s almost like you have to switch it off and not think about it as much.

Participant 8 also addressed the central priority of mission, saying:

Work is the number one priority and school comes second—that’s just the way it is. Being in the military, other people’s lives depend on us. If you’re lacking at work, then you could put someone else or yourself in danger, so the mission always comes first.

Participant 8 also said that, while serving on active duty, a service member may need to complete military trainings and specialty classes:

Again, the, the job comes first . . . when you’re in any kind of upgrade training or any kind of specialty class, there are tests. There are assignments . . . those [the assignments] are priorities. The assignments have to be done before any kind of

schoolwork gets done . . . it would reflect . . . more upon you if you failed one work assignment, but you passed a homework assignment in school.

Participant 6 described not only the importance of the mission, but also his responsibility as a senior NCO to motivate his troops:

The mission is first. . . . You are a hundred percent committed to the mission, so the biggest thing was to keep everyone else up. Even if you're down, your job is to tell your troops, "Hey it will get better."

Short- or no-notice deployments. Many different events, trainings, operations, and missions result in the deployment of military service members around the world. Because the timing of deployments is often unpredictable, short- or no-notice deployments may be necessary. Both short- and no-notice deployments can be challenging to military students who want to pursue higher education because of various factors, from the timing of deployments to the at-times-unknown locations of deployments.

Several participants discussed examples of no-notice deployments. Participant 2 stated:

I was out having dinner with some friends, and I got a phone call . . . it was my supervisor saying I had to procure a crew. We had 6 hours to get everybody together and designated. You had to have your bags packed because at 3:30 in the morning, we were going to be on the plane getting ready to go. From that point on, we didn't know where we were going, we didn't know what we were doing, we were gone.

Participant 4 said:

it was a Saturday, I was working weekend duty. I was working on aircraft, getting the jets ready. I was repairing any broken aircraft in order for the aircraft to be ready for flying on Monday. My supervisors called me into the office and said, "We're deploying. We're getting ready to leave. It is a no-notice deployment. Go home. Pack your bags. Say goodbye to your wife and children and then report back to here." I lived in Nuevo Alcala, New Alcala. It was town

southeast of Torrejón Air Force Base, maybe 15 miles away. So I had to drive there and hurry up and pack my uniforms and the biochemical gas masks, the helmets that we had for training, the suits, and the rubber boots. I kissed my then wife and my oldest son and daughter, and my wife asked, “Where are you going?” I could not tell them where we were going—actually, I didn’t know where we were going. . . .

Participants also spoke of challenges associated with short-notice deployments.

To fight the war in Iraq, Participant 3 received a 3-week notice, and Participant 5 received a notice of 3 to 4 months. Participant 7 said that he had been married for only 4 months before receiving deployment orders to a combat zone: “you’ve got to go, so you’re leaving in a week.” Short-notice deployments may also be the result of a scheduled service member being injured or sick. Participant 2 stated:

I’ve also had phone calls in the middle of the night. One phone call . . . my supervisor said, “Hey, somebody’s sick, we need you now.” I got up, went to the bathroom, brushed my teeth, threw on my uniform, grabbed my bag that’s always ready to go, and I walked out the door. Once I got to the plane, I replaced the person that was sick and then shaved in the bathroom as we flew.

Participant 4 also experienced short-notice deployments:

there’s been a couple of times that I wasn’t scheduled to go on deployment but you have people that get injured or they are sick. You have to fill that person’s position. You immediately begin thinking about what you need to take, the equipment you need. They’ll [supervisors] tell you what to take, your clothes, your socks, your boots, your helmet, your flak vest. You have to organize all of that. A lot of people, and me included, we had a bag set aside already built up. You just quickly went through the bag to make sure everything is still in there. You have clothes, an extra set of toothbrush, your shaving cream—just sitting in the bag waiting.

Living conditions. Living conditions in different deployment locations overseas often present challenges for active-duty military students who want to pursue higher education. While some deployment locations provide private individual rooms and bathrooms, there are other deployment locations that are less than desirable. While

deployed, the participants in this study had often slept in tents, trailers, or dorms and, many times, shared a bathroom; these living conditions were not the most private or comfortable, resulting in increased stress. Participant 1 said, “There’s probably 60 people per trailer,” with two people per room. The “bathroom is located outside the trailer, and about six trailers share that bathroom.” Participant 7 described his living experiences in the trailers:

They are like little tiny trailers that you would find on a construction site that are being used for an office. When I was deployed, they put the trailers together and built a hallway in between them and made them into like, little hotel rooms, so to speak. Um, but they are very flimsy. They are not meant for long term. The trailers are not tents, so they are considered hardened. You have actual walls, but there’s not a lot of insulation. There are lights through the trailers. There are also trailer latrines, but you may not be close to one. It depends, you know, you could be close to a latrine or you might have to walk. In my experience, the latrine was far away. I would have to walk about a block or two to get to the bathroom or take a shower or do whatever . . . get ready, shave, whatever you need to do.

Participant 5 described the trailers as luxury as compared to other living conditions:

the trailers are single-wide trailers which are split into three sections with two people per section. That’s luxury. You had one A/C for each trailer. Temperatures were typically over 120 degrees. There was a lot of . . . fine dust. You are not going to be able to get rid of the dust, and because we had dust storms—you had red dust everywhere. You would constantly have to clean out the filters of the A/C unit . . . when it rained, the dust turned into mud so . . . it was, pretty interesting.

Tents were often the most undesirable living conditions. Participant 4 said:

The worst part is living in tents. In Italy, I was there around the wintertime. It was cold and the tents are—the tents are thick. They have a unit outside for air-conditioning and heating, but they were so old, a lot of the times, they would break down. You wouldn’t have any AC during the summer months or heat during the winter months. The tents were not like a house with different rooms, it’s all open-bay. You would have to scavenge for some sheets, some blankets to use, to put up as walls for privacy . . . the tents would live maybe six people comfortably. In my tent, we had 13 people, so you had a very, very small area.

While deployed to a combat zone in Iraq, Participant 3 lived in a tent with about 50 other troops: “sand all around, no trees. We lived in tents with berms of sand surrounding the base.” Participant 3 said that there were no hardened facilities other than the chow hall. When asked about bathroom facilities, he said, “For the most part, its porta-potties.” He also discussed the showering facilities:

The water had to be trucked in. It’s dangerous to truck anything in because of IEDs [improvised explosive devices]. . . . The water had to be rationed . . . one Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi . . . and so you get yourself wet, you turn the water off, you lather up, and then you rinse off, and that’s your shower. So . . . you’re never really clean. You’re just always covered in sand. Everybody else is the same way, so everyone is miserable. You’re always miserable.

Participant 7 described his experiences living in the dorms:

You would have maybe a sink and a fridge and a wall locker to store your stuff. In our dorm, we had bunk beds. So there were three sets of bunk beds, we had six in that room, and there was one little bathroom that was shared between all six of the guys. Now, we didn’t always have six in there. People come and go, so sometimes we were down to three, but other times we were up to six. The only problem with that is that when you deploy, we still had about three bags of gear that we had to store. You have a personal bag, then you have another bag of regular gear, and then you have another bag of, um, chemical gear. We had to take all of our chemical stuff with us. So that’s three huge bags, so if you’ve got six people, that’s 18 bags. We basically had one wall just stacked of bags. There wasn’t a lot of room, so you’re tripping on one another, but hey, it was air conditioned. It had a sink. You know, and you have a bed. It’s not a sleeping bag and a floor. You actually had a mattress, and so that’s considered really good.

There were noted differences in living conditions of some higher-ranking enlisted personnel, senior NCOs, and officers. For example, Participant 6, a senior NCO, stated: “We were living in a trailer, and for senior NCOs, you have your own room, which is a huge thing. If I would have had another roommate, it would have been very difficult to go to school. . . .”

Participant 9, an officer, said “We lived in trailers, portable trailers. I think they were 20-room trailers with our whole unit. I was the officer, so I was lucky and got my own room.”

Internet-Related Challenges to Completing Coursework While on Deployment

Participants identified several types of Internet-related challenges to completing coursework while on deployment. Depending on the deployment location, inconsistent connectivity to the Internet and limited access to the Internet were significant factors that made completing coursework among deployed military challenging. Additionally, for security purposes, military bases impose certain Internet restrictions. The location and terrorist threat level of a base usually determine the type of restrictions; therefore, restrictions often vary among the different deployment locations around the world.

Connectivity to the Internet. Internet connectivity varies with the deployment location and at different locations across a military base. Although it was most conducive for many of the participants to complete their coursework in their tents, trailers, or dorms, Internet connectivity was often weak and unreliable in the participants’ living spaces. Participant 8 said:

Internet connectivity was shady at best. It was based off Wi-Fi, so depending on where you lived on the base, you would have strong Internet or you would have weak Internet. Uh, for me to actually access the classes and all of the information that was online, I’d have to walk to a certain part of the base. I would have to make sure I had the Internet strength that I needed to download papers and submit papers. You are basically finding Internet space among everyone who’s trying to call home, Skype home—uh, you know, watch movies, play games, whatever they’re doing recreational, you were trying to complete your assignments for an education.

Participant 5 described his attempts at accessing the Internet while in his living accommodations:

if you were trying to do homework at home it probably would have been difficult because the Internet was horrible at your personal living area. The Internet was intermittent—very bad . . . it was so bad, it was like trying to get data through a straw. The amount of data that was going in and out was so slow, that it would take a couple of minutes just for you to go from one page to the next page. There's no way you could actually do homework in your personal living area. You would have to go to some kind of recreational area where they had Internet, and then it was somewhat better. . . .

Rather than trying to complete his coursework in his trailer, Participant 5 often chose to stay at work once his shift was over to finish his assignments:

I decided just to stay longer at work because, as an analyst, our Internet is going to be better than everybody else's Internet. We are receiving information and doing briefings, our Internet was better. I just stayed at work and did it there and then went home.

Participant 6 also faced challenges when trying to complete his assignments in his trailer, and he, too, stayed at work to complete his assignments:

The connectivity was pretty bad in the trailers. So usually, when I was done with my 12-hour shift, I would stay at work to work on my assignments because work had better Internet. I would shut the door and finish my assignments. I would stay at work for 2 hours, so it would end up being a 14-hour day at work—and that's how I always did it, after a 12-hour shift. One of the things I did not do was complete any of my homework on duty time. If I was on the computer, it was for work. It's not fair for the other guys to be out on the flight line while I'm doing homework.

Even though Participant 9 had a government computer in his room, he also experienced limited or inconsistent connectivity:

We had Internet access in the room [inside the trailer]. I had an actual computer in my room as well, a government computer, so I was able to work on my homework, but the Internet connection was somewhat limited in my room. We had to upload videos for the class, and sometimes the videos wouldn't go through. It would take several attempts at that. . . . They are usually between an hour and

an hour and a half long videos. I'd start my computer and the video would load while I was at work, and then I would watch it when I got home. . . .

Limited access to the Internet. Another challenging factor for deployed military students is limited access to the Internet. Participant 3 discussed his early educational successes while deployed in Turkey and his later educational challenges while serving on active duty in Iraq:

I started going to school and man, I really started knocking classes out. I was really on a roll. When I was deployed to Iraq, what a wall I hit! I mean as far as going to school, I really hit a wall. The first class I took, there was just no way—I mean I barely got through it. Trying to even get access to the Internet was almost impossible. I mean how do you post online when you do not have Internet access? You have to wait sometimes half an hour to get Internet access or even access to a phone for that matter, and then you get kicked off because there's a line. The guy behind you, it's his turn next, and he wants to surf the web or check his email or whatever, which is super great—but I have an assignment that I need to turn in, or I need to communicate with my professor, or whatever the case is. Not that what he needs to do isn't important or valid and that he shouldn't be able to communicate with his family, but I'm trying to go to school. No one cared, it didn't matter.

Participant 2 stated:

there are some countries that we were told to not bring electronics period. . . . If you bring any device into the country and connect to anything, they [the enemy] will put stuff on your computer . . . there were countries that we went to where I . . . left my computers in the boxes and bags turned off. I never turned them [computers] on because [of the potential for] a virus or malware or tracking or keyloggers . . . because they [the enemy] see us coming in . . . they sit there and just wait to see who turns their [computer] on . . . it's like the computer's right there, I know my homework is due in 2 days, but . . . I'm not going to log into my . . . account because . . . if there's a keylogger program running, then they're [the enemy] going to know my log-in account, they're going to know my password. Then they're going to log in later after I'm gone and . . . see what my name is, where my account information is, my home address, my mailing address . . . they will take all that and use it for various reasons. . . .

While there are times when limited access to the Internet is a challenge, there are times when military service members have no access to the Internet or access to any other

form of communication such as phone calls, other than for government purposes. “River City” is a term for a reduced communication status that occurs when all contact with the outside world is cut in order to notify the family of a wounded or killed service member (Lawrence, 2010). Participant 7 described one mission in which a helicopter was shot down, resulting in the tragic loss of the air crew, nine military service members. Prior to notifying the families, the base imposed River City to ensure that the families learned of their loss via military officials rather via other forms of communications such as social media.

Challenges to Focus and Concentration While on Deployment

As the participants pointed out, there are deployment locations around the world that challenge the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of the deployed military troops, affecting the ability of military students to focus and concentrate on academic work. Many factors affect the quality of coursework completed by deployed military personnel pursuing higher education, including weather, work schedules, lack of sleep, and stress.

Weather. Many participants described the intense heat of several deployment locations as one of the most significant factors affecting their focus and concentration and completion of assignments. Participant 1 referred to the temperature of one specific deployment location as “anywhere between 110 to about 130 degrees.” Participant 3 also described temperatures as being:

anywhere from 110 to 130. . . . It’s incredible. The heat—you’re just wet. You just wake up and you’re soaked. It’s miserable. I mean, certainly they have air conditioners, but it’s not like what you think of here as air conditioning. It’s just—it’s just not the same, you know . . . it’s constantly—it’s just constantly hot.

The career field of military troops may exacerbate stress already caused by intense temperatures. For example, Participant 4, a Crew Chief mechanic for fighter aircraft, often worked on flight lines:

on the flight line with the engines running and all of the concrete, the temperature can get up to 160 degrees, 100% humidity . . . everybody lost weight. . . . You had on your BDU uniform, battle dress uniform, and on top of that, you had to put on your biochemical jacket—your pants are thick, lined with charcoal—your combat boots, you had to put rubber boots on top of your combat boots. The helmet, you had to wear that. You also had to wear what we call the insert glove, it's a white cotton glove. On top of that [white cotton gloves], you have to put on your rubber chemical gloves, and work on aircraft in the heat, and so by the time you get done working, you take off your gas mask, and the sweat just pours out. Exhausting.

Participant 7 described how the intense heat affected the quality of sleep of troops:

[a specific deployment location] was miserably, miserably hot. I think it got up to 124 [degrees] . . . the air conditioner would break down quite a bit . . . if the air conditioning went out . . . it's pretty miserable. . . . When it gets 117 degrees . . . you go outside [in the heat] in a full uniform and gear and a gas mask . . . you—sweat really, really bad, so you'll feel like . . . you could—wring out your uniform. I was sweating like I was taking a shower because it was so hot. . . .

Work schedules. The work schedules of deployed military personnel—which can be mentally and physically stressful, laborious, and exhausting—often present challenges to focus and concentration. As an Aerospace Propulsion Specialist, Participant 1 maintained military aircraft. While enrolled in two college classes, he was ordered to “change the entire fuel system on one of the engines,” a difficult and arduous undertaking:

we had to change the entire fuel system on one of the engines, and that's just a ton of different components . . . we would show up to work at about 5 in the morning, and we would leave about 8 at night. . . . On top of that, we had another aircraft that we had to support, launch out, and bring back. . . . My buddy Sean was on the trip . . . and I was like, “I'm just not doing school right now. I can't do it.”

The mission and terrorist threat often determine the work schedule for many military troops. On one mission, Participant 2 worked 36 hours, leaving no time for studying:

36 hours was my work day . . . you get on the plane, you start it up, you fly . . . you are fixing stuff, you know, adjusting equipment, replacing equipment, turning wrenches for 36 hours straight . . . we flew for that duration. We were flying, doing our work for that long because we can aerial refuel, so it doesn't matter how much gas you have—you have an unlimited supply of gas. We were working non-stop for 36 hours flying and then we had to do our pre-flights and . . . our post-flights. On top of that, you do your debriefs and then you have to file all of the paperwork. So, . . . you try to get as much sleep as you can . . . I got back to my rack or my bunk bed . . . and I would just pass out for the next 12 hours—I'm just out.

Participant 3, who was stationed in Iraq while enrolled in a college class, said that his work schedule heavily influenced his study time:

You work 12 hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week, but it takes an hour or 2 hours to post out . . . and an hour for guard mount or to communicate to your group . . . and the posting . . . you, you, you, you guys are going to go here, and you, you, you, you're going to go here. . . . We're all going to get together and talk about what we're going to do . . . and brief about what happened the night before. . . . This is going to take an hour, and that's going to take another hour for us to get out there, so this is going to take 15 hours.

The numerous deployment locations around the world present varied challenges.

Participant 7 said that, while deployed in a war zone:

you do what you had to do . . . if we had someone come in or hurt or wounded or anything else like that, you know . . . you can go without sleep . . . 12 hours is nothing. I've worked a 22-hour day before, many times.

Participant 8 stated that the difficulty of his work schedule while enrolled in college presented the main challenge to completing his coursework:

there were times that we didn't know when we would be working or for how long. So, if we had an assignment due . . . you could be halfway through the

assignment, get called into work, work 24 hours, and still not know if you're going to go home for a little bit and then have to go back to work.

If pockets of personal time presented themselves, Participant 8 said, "sometimes you have to make a choice between 'are you going to do homework or are you going to sleep?'" He said that his schedule:

was 6 days on, 1 day off . . . so the 1 day off was when I had time to work on my homework. On a usual day, we will work between 12 and 14 hours, and most days it would go longer . . . the schedule is pretty much, you go to work, you get home, you eat, shower, go to sleep. . . .

Lack of sleep. Many participants stated that lack of sleep significantly affected their focus and concentration, influencing their quality of work when completing assignments. The work schedules and lack of quality sleep of deployed military service members present challenges to completing careful and thought-out assignments. After flying for a significant number of hours, Participant 2 had 45 minutes to complete an assignment to meet the due date. He stated:

I got off the plane . . . and I just started typing something to get something in, some credit. I slept for . . . 12 hours, I woke up, and when I had access again, I looked at what I had written . . . it made no sense. It was all incoherent and there was just . . . random thoughts everywhere, all over the place.

Because of his work schedule and lack of quality sleep, Participant 2 was unable to complete his master's degree.

training other people and doing my job at the same time as well as the coursework for the master's degree program, I just couldn't perform. I didn't have enough time to meet the standard requirements . . . I did all of the assignments and I got a "C" in the class, but it didn't count for your master's . . . C's are not good enough. After that I just realized . . . I can't perform to the level I need to or dedicate enough time I need to do the coursework in the time frame allotted for that degree, so I haven't been able to take any classes since.

Participant 5 stated that the schedule is physically and emotionally taxing: "... you're drained mentally and physically, so trying to focus on homework would be something a super person would have to do. It's difficult." Participants 6 and 10 reinforced the challenging nature of deployed military students' schedules. Participant 6 said, "I don't think I did as good in school because I was tired." He said that he had submitted all assignments on time, but the quality of work of his assignments "was not near as good" as it would have been if he had not been tired. Participant 10 said that the schedule and lack of quality sleep were "very difficult." As a result of his demanding work schedule, Participant 8 also submitted less than the desired quality of work. The schedule, he said, is:

exhausting. There have been times when I couldn't do homework, just because I was so tired . . . I knew I needed to do something—this assignment's coming up, but . . . it wasn't going to get done at that time . . . I would, I guess, chalk that day up as a loss, get some sleep, and then try to do it the next day. I know I probably could have done better, but there were just times that I felt, I'm already late, I just need to get this done . . . I've turned in papers that have been short on length and probably lacked content because I didn't have the time to sit down and actually concentrate on my homework . . . it wasn't the best work.

Stress. Varied missions, threat levels, and deployment locations can result in increased stress levels, affecting the psychological, emotional, mental, and physical health of military service members. While deployed, Participant 1 was responsible for repairing a part of an aircraft that was "extremely crucial" for a safe and successful flight mission:

To get this plane ready to fly in the air again . . . I felt like I aged probably 5 years that week just from stress alone. It was like, "Oh no." . . . "Please don't let anything bad happen to this plane." . . . it was just really, really stressful, and school was the last thing on my mind.

Finding it difficult to talk, Participant 2 discussed the fear and distress he experienced on certain missions:

there's been times where I literally get off the plane, I'll go to my bunk bed . . . and I'll just sit there . . . and try to digest and decompress on what you just did or what just happened or how close you were to just not being . . . sometimes, I'll text my family or call them—you don't tell them what happened or what you did or what's going on, you know . . . sometimes my dad could tell because, if I talked to him on the phone, he could hear it in my voice, and I just wanted to talk to family. . . .

Participant 2 said that, when working in stressful conditions, “homework is the last thing on my mind. . . .”

As Participant 5 discussed, often-unpredictable threat factors such as mortar and rocket attacks leave little to no room to focus on school:

you're analyzing your situation a lot more over there [combat zone] because you're trying to look out for your safety. We were—we were mortar and rocket attacked . . . 30-something times a month, so you had alarms going off . . . frequently. You didn't know when the mortar or rocket attacks were going to come, so you have an alarm . . . if you hear an alarm in your area, then that means it's in close proximity. You have . . . 8 seconds to find . . . what they call T-walls . . . they are set up in a certain way so if a rocket or a mortar was to hit it a T-wall . . . it wouldn't completely blow your shelter up. . . .

Participant 3 discussed his focus on his personal safety and the safety of the troops in his squadron as being of a higher priority than studying and completing assignments.

There was definitely an amount of stress as far as my safety. . . . It helped being armed all the time . . . but you just never knew what was going to be—what the next minute was going to hold, or the next hour or the next day or the next week or month . . . you know the human body has a fight or flight instinct, and that's at the forefront of your thought process at all times . . . and anything else is . . . to the wayside. . . .

Participant 3 discussed the many crosses representing those service members who had courageously died at one deployment location. Knowing that many troops had died in that area brought forth the realization of the mortality of every service member:

There's crosses all over that base . . . that's where this guy died. I don't know when they [the crosses] were dated . . . I wasn't there when it happened, but I could see the crosses there, you know? . . . they were all . . . they were all over the base. I'm here. I'm just as here as that guy was. There's no way, there's no way. I mean . . . what do you do with all that [psychological and emotional stress]?

The stress associated with maintaining a high degree of safety was evident in many of the discussions with participants. Participant 4 stated that the safety of all troops is of utmost importance: “staying safe . . . you can't think about anything else.”

Participant 4 discussed the intense pressure on a Crew Chief to ensure the safety of the pilots:

the pilots put their lives in my hand. There were crew chiefs that . . . mentally started breaking down. I had to keep myself going. The pilot put his life in my hand. If I do something wrong, his life would be ended.

Proactiveness and Responsibility of Service Members

While the participants discussed challenges to pursuing higher education while deployed, they also talked about ways to overcome the challenges, beginning with personal responsibility and accountability. The participants identified the importance of taking active roles in their education. Choice of college and communication with professors were major topics associated with the theme of proactiveness and responsibility.

Choice of college. To be successful in his higher education, it was important for Participant 1 to choose a college that understood military students and provided flexible

learning schedules. He is enrolled in a university that offers per-course enrollment programs. The courses are completed through an independent study model, thereby offering students increased flexibility. Participant 1 felt that his educational success has been heavily influenced by the resources, services, and enrollment options that his university offers.

Participant 5 stated that the college he chose to attend while serving on active duty understands military students and the potential challenges of deployments; therefore, the professors were more understanding, offering assignment extensions when needed. As with Participant 5, Participants 6 and 7 chose a university that maintained and demonstrated a vast knowledge of military students. Many of their professors had prior military experience and demonstrated a greater understanding of the military, including deployments. Participant 7 stated that his professors were “sympathetic and flexible instructors.”

Communication with professors. Maintaining open communication with professors has been essential to the academic success of the participants. Participants stated that, during the first week of class, it was very important to inform their professors that they were active duty military and deployed. In the majority of the participants’ experiences, professors were understanding and wanted to be of help whenever possible. In one situation, Participant 6 was taking an exam when the Internet went down and locked him out of the test. He had not completed the test and emailed the professor stating he had been disconnected. The professor replied, saying, “No problem. I’ll reload the test.”

Participant 9 said that his professor was very understanding, perhaps due to his many experiences with military students. While deployed, Participant 9 communicated with his professor, stating that there might be times when an assignment was submitted late, primarily due to his work schedule and/or limited access to the Internet. His professor was “very understanding . . . very good about it” and offered flexibility when needed. Participant 10 stated that he had received a short-notice deployment order while enrolled in a college class. He was deploying in three days and communicated this to his professor. The professor created a final exam specifically for Participant 10 so that he could compete it before leaving. Participant 10 said that his professor was very understanding and “worked with me.”

Summary

As introduced in this chapter, research into experiences that study participants have had while deployed led to the emergence of four themes: (a) challenges to pursuing higher education, (b) Internet-related challenges to completing coursework, (c) challenges to focus and concentration, and (d) proactiveness and responsibility of service members. These themes and their significance to higher education are discussed further in Chapter 5.

As participants discussed, deployed military service members face various stressors that other students are not experiencing—stressors that challenge their psychological, mental, emotional, and physical health, affecting their ability to complete academic work at the desired level of quality within deadlines. Despite these challenges

to their well-being, deployed military troops are responsible and held accountable for completing important missions as well as meeting their academic goals.

Chapter 5

Significance of Findings

As stated in previous chapters, the purpose of this research study was to identify gaps in understanding the specialized educational needs of active-duty or deployed military service members enrolled in higher education and to develop new insights and knowledge that may be helpful to college and university administrators, faculty, and staff in designing and implementing initiatives, strategic plans, and resources to address these needs most effectively. Applying the frameworks of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1984) and Tinto's theoretical retention model (Tinto, 2012) to insights gained through the data analysis for this study yields information that can help institutions of higher learning to best meet these needs. Chapter 2, Literature Review, introduces these frameworks as well as other major sources that informed this study, while Chapter 3, Research Methods, discusses the methodology used in the data collection and data analysis of this study. Chapter 4, Presentation of Data, summarizes the interview data and discusses the results of the data analysis. This chapter explores numerous aspects of the significance of those findings, using the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory and applying Tinto's theoretical retention model.

As discussed in Chapter 4, four primary themes concerning the unique challenges and responsibilities of active-duty military students emerged from the data analysis: (a) challenges to pursuing higher education while on deployment, (b) Internet-related challenges to completing coursework while on deployment, (c) challenges to focus and concentration while on deployment, and (d) proactiveness and responsibility of service

members. The first and second sections of this chapter discuss findings associated with these themes, in alignment with Schlossberg's and Tinto's theoretical frameworks, respectively. Also aligned with the theme-related findings and theoretical frameworks, the third and fourth sections provides recommendations for practice and future research, respectively.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Aligning the elements of Schlossberg's Transition Theory with the experiences of the participants in this research study provides a greater understanding of the challenges that deployed military students enrolled in higher education face. As discussed in Chapter 2, building on the framework of psychosocial development theory, Schlossberg created a systematic theoretical framework that facilitated a greater understanding of adults in transition (Evans et al., 2010).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory focuses on "an examination of what constitutes a transition, different forms of transitions, the transition process, and factors that influence transitions" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 214). Broadly defined, a transition is any event or non-event that changes one's assumptions, beliefs, routines, or relationships, thereby requiring corresponding changes in one's behavior (Goodman et al., 2006). Transitions may be described as high-profile or subtle life events involving gains or losses (p. 33). For some, the changes in behavior that are required to navigate a transition successfully are easy to make; for others, the changes may take years. Schlossberg's 4S System (2008), which groups types of transitions into four categories—situation, self, support,

and strategies—highlights an individual’s potential resources for successful navigation of transitions.

Situation. The data analysis results indicated that the most difficult of the 4S categories for deployed service members to navigate while successfully pursuing higher education was situation [deployment]. As discussed in Chapter 2, factors that are considered important when examining a situation are (a) what triggered the transition, (b) timing, (c) what aspects one can control, (d) whether a role change is involved, (e) duration, (f) previous experiences with a similar transition, (g) concurrent stress, and (h) assessment—whether the individual views the situation positively, negatively, or as benign (Goodman et al., 2006).

In this research study, the data analysis indicated that three of these factors—control, duration, and concurrent stress—are the most challenging for military students during deployments. The following discussion explores these factors in connection with the three themes related to challenges to educational activity while on deployment:

(1) challenges to pursuing higher education, (2) Internet-related challenges to completing coursework, and (3) challenges to focus and concentration. Control and duration were most significant for the first and second of these, while concurrent stress was most significant for the latter.

Challenges to pursuing higher education while on deployment. In the analysis of the theme “challenges to pursuing higher education while on deployment” and the evaluation of situation [deployment], control and duration were the most important factors in understanding transitions.

Control. Deployments were often beyond the study participants' control, as evidenced by the many short- and no-notice deployments that they had experienced. Although some active-duty personnel are given time to plan for a deployment, others are not. In such situations, the transitions [deployments] are external, often forced upon the service member by world or national circumstances. According to Goodman et al. (2006), while a transition may be beyond an individual's control, the response to the transition is often within the individual's control. The data from this research study showed that all participants understood the importance and significance of deployments, and that, despite having been greatly influenced by transitions outside their control, all were ready to place the mission as the highest priority and complete the mission carefully, thoroughly, and successfully. The service members maintained a high degree of internal control, carried out the requirements of the mission and deployment, and remained committed to meeting their academic goals, despite the hardships of deployment.

The transition difficulties that participants discussed did not lie within the responsibilities associated with being a service member as much as within the responsibilities associated with being a student while deployed. For example, the living conditions of some deployment locations presented challenges for them in pursuing higher education while on active duty. Living conditions were outside the participants' control, as external factors determined deployment locations and living conditions. Living in certain conditions was not a deliberate decision for these service members. For many, the living conditions often lacked privacy and comfort, creating a less than ideal

learning environment. Living in a tent or trailer with other service members who had differing work and sleep schedules resulted in a less-than-conducive learning environment. Respecting the schedules of all troops was a high priority—particularly for service members in a combat or war zone. The participants would not complete assignments if doing so meant interfering with other service members' sleep schedules.

Duration. In addition to less-than-ideal living conditions, duration of deployment often made completion of classes more difficult for the participants. Duration of deployment varies with the mission, resulting in deployments lasting from months to two or more years. Because duration is determined by external factors, the service members lacked any sense of control over this factor. Even though deployments are not permanent, temporary status does not necessarily lessen the potential stress of the transition. Depending on the duration and mission of the deployment, active-duty personnel may not be able to enroll in college classes for a set number of months, thereby significantly lengthening their higher-educational trajectory.

Internet-related challenges to completing coursework while on deployment.

Analysis of the data in relation to situation, as described by Goodman et al. (2006), showed that control and duration were also of significance in the theme “Internet-related challenges to completing coursework while on deployment.”

Control. While study participants overlooked the unpleasant living conditions of their deployments as best they could and carried on with the requirements of the mission, oftentimes, the learning environment could not be overlooked. At times, limited Internet access and intermittent Internet connectivity resulted in a learning environment that was

increasingly challenging, and, as a result, pursuing higher education during certain deployments was difficult. Depending on the conditions of the deployment, lack of control over access to or connectivity to the Internet made completing assignments and submitting them on time difficult. Limited access and intermittent connectivity were results of external factors, including the type of base, deployment location, and base-level restrictions and policies—factors outside service members’ control.

Duration. As in the findings for the theme “challenges to pursuing higher education while on deployment,” the duration of limited Internet access and intermittent connectivity depended on the location and duration of deployment. Service members who endured such hindrances while deployed to more remote and less established locations were at a disadvantage compared to those deployed to locations with established and strong Internet access and connectivity. With much of their focus on online classes, participants deployed for longer durations to areas with limited Internet access and connectivity found it more and more challenging to complete coursework.

Challenges to focus and concentration while on deployment. Although individual service members’ situations varied, the most significant factor in the theme “challenges to focus and concentration while on deployment” was concurrent stress.

Concurrent stress. As transitions, deployments tend to challenge service members physically, emotionally, mentally, and psychologically. Adding difficulty to the deployment itself is the expectation to complete quality coursework while deployed. As discussed in Chapter 4, factors such as weather, work schedules, and other sources of stress challenge service members’ focus and concentration levels, resulting in transitions

that can be increasingly difficult. For example, temperatures in some deployment locations can be intense, ranging from 110 to 130 degrees Fahrenheit, with 100% humidity. Working in these conditions exhausts the mind and body, leaving little ability to focus and concentrate on completing quality coursework.

Additionally, the work schedule of deployed military personnel is often challenging, with many working 6 days a week, 12 hours or more a day. Work schedules are largely determined by the requirements of the mission, with little to no room for negotiation or change of schedules. As evidenced by the study participants' responses, the mission is of utmost priority, and the schedules of the service members reflect this. Their often tiring and arduous work schedules challenge the careful and thorough completion of well-thought-out assignments.

Furthermore, many deployed military personnel experience higher levels of stress compared to those stationed stateside. While carrying out the requirements of the mission, the first priority is the safety of all service members. Factors influencing the safety of deployed service members include the type and location of base, the threat analysis, the threat assessment, and the terrorist threat level, as defined in Chapter 1. In a combat or war zone, unpredictable threat factors such as mortar, rocket, and ground attacks significantly increased the stress levels of the study participants. In other deployment locations, not necessarily a combat or war zone, factors to ensure successful flight and ground missions added increased stress. In this study, all participants said that on deployment they had focused and concentrated heavily on the personal safety of all

troops as well as the mission itself, thereby, at times, leaving them with little energy to focus on concentrating on completing quality assignments.

Self. Goodman et al. (2006) identify characteristics that are important and relevant for individuals as they manage and cope with a transition:

- Personal and demographic characteristics
 - Socioeconomic status
 - Age and stage of life
 - State of health
 - Ethnicity/culture
- Psychological resources
 - Ego development
 - Outlook-optimism and self-efficacy
 - Commitment and values
 - Spirituality and resiliency

As discussed in Chapter 4, the study participants each identified their reasons for enlisting in the U.S. military and serving on active duty. Although they stated different reasons for having enlisted, each had made his decision based on personal and demographic characteristics as well as psychological resources, as described by Goodman et al. (2006). The personal and demographic characteristics that had most influenced participants' decisions to join the military were age and stage of life. Additionally, psychological resources pertaining to commitment and values as well as spirituality and resiliency significantly influenced decisions to serve on active duty. The

participants' age, stage of life, commitment, and values directly affected how they perceived and assessed their lives. Based on their individual assessments, the participants made deliberate and purposeful decisions to enlist and serve active duty in the military.

During various deployments, the participants had drawn upon their individual personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources to successfully navigate the deployments and complete the requirements of the missions. Depending on the nature of the deployment, there were times when a service member's well-being was increasingly challenged. Although at times very difficult, maintaining a strong commitment to the mission in addition to demonstrating a high degree of resiliency led to successful navigation of the transition, thus contributing to the successful completion of the mission.

Despite the service members' strong sense of self and dedication to the mission, pursuing higher education while deployed in certain locations was quite difficult. Factors outside their control often influenced their quality of work, leaving them frustrated and, at times, discouraged. The academic frustration and discouragement that they experienced was often directly lessened by support they received from higher-ranking leaders, the college itself, and professors.

Support. As defined by Goodman et al. (2006), social support is often a key factor to successfully managing stress. Goodman et al. categorizes the different types of social support that an individual receives as sources of support: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and/or communities (p. 93). According to Goodman et al. (2006), those individuals who maintain strong social supports will

most likely transition more fluently or quickly than others who do not have strong support systems. The participants in this study discussed the importance of receiving support from higher-ranking leadership, the college or university, and professors in successfully completing a military mission and successfully pursuing higher education.

The more supportive the higher-ranking leadership, college, and professors, the more successful the service members were in pursuing higher education. For promotion opportunities and in the face of increased competitiveness among peers, pursuing higher education is imperative for active-duty service members. Many higher-ranking military personnel demonstrated understanding of the importance to their subordinates of higher education and were supportive, often encouraging the participants to enroll in or continue to pursue higher education. The study participants who felt that their leaders had been supportive of their pursuit of higher education tended to be more successful in navigating the transition and completing classes. Additionally, those service members who felt support from the college as well as from their professors felt that they had been more academically successful than they would otherwise have been.

The importance of establishing and maintaining a strong support structure is evident in all four themes identified during this study. The transition of a deployment can be unpredictable in various ways; therefore, it is essential that a service member maintain a strong support network. The healthy well-being of all deployed military personnel involved in completing a mission is imperative to personal safety of all and to the academic success of the individual students participating in the mission.

Strategies. The importance of maintaining effective strategies while deployed cannot be underestimated. The different threat levels and various missions of deployments require a service member to be well equipped with the knowledge necessary to maintain a high degree of personal safety and the safety of others. Additionally, oftentimes, the troop must be able to perform the requirements of the mission under high levels of external stressors. As discussed by Taylor (1998), there are two general types of coping strategies: problem-solving strategies and emotion-focused strategies. Individuals are more likely to use a problem-solving approach when they perceive the stressors as being potentially within their control and an emotion-focused approach when the stressors are more external or outside their control (para. 1). Deployments present many factors that are outside service members' control—from the deployment location and duration to the various threat and terrorist levels. Deployed service members pursuing higher education are affected not only by these factors, but also by living conditions, weather, work schedules, and access and connectivity to the Internet. While the majority of factors in a deployment are external, the service members must implement a strategic problem-solving approach as opposed to an emotion-focused approach to coping with these factors and fulfilling their academic goals as well as the mission.

Proactiveness and responsibility of service members. Although maintaining effective strategies was evident in all themes, strategies were especially significant in the theme “proactiveness and responsibility of service members.” While all study participants discussed challenges to pursuing higher education while deployed, the participants were focused on being proactive and taking responsibility to learn and

implement the most effective strategies to overcome the challenges. The data analysis results indicated that the most important strategy for deployed military students is the choice of college or university. Many participants discussed the importance of choosing a college or university that is knowledgeable about the circumstances of service members, including deployments. Two universities that participants discussed most frequently were (a) a private nonprofit university offering residential and online degree programs, and (b) a for-profit university offering online degree programs.

The first university employed many professors with a prior military background; because of this, the university and professors were very familiar with the individual circumstances of service members enrolled in higher education. The professors understood the different factors and potential challenges of deployment and therefore were very understanding and helpful. For example, if service members needed extensions for assignments due to factors such as work schedules, limited Internet access or intermittent connectivity, the professors were understanding and offered the extra time needed to complete the assignment.

The study participants also discussed a second university—one that was also knowledgeable and understanding of service members and deployments. Most important and beneficial to the participants were the program formats that this university offers: term enrollment programs and per-course enrollment programs. The term enrollment program format is 10 weeks in length and is similar to a traditional term, with outlined start and end dates as well as assignment due dates. The per-course enrollment program is also 10 weeks in length but does not have determined start dates. The per-course

enrollment classes are based on an independent study model. The student determines the start date of the class at a time most convenient for him or her. In addition to this flexibility, there are no assignment due dates within the per-course program. If the student meets all objectives and completes all required assignments within the 10-week timeframe, the student will have met the requirements of the class.

Attending a college that is knowledgeable about and understanding toward military personnel was paramount to the participants' academic success. Flexible class formats such as the independent study model allowed the deployed service member to complete assignments in a timeframe most conducive to him. Factors such as access and connectivity to the Internet must be taken into consideration in some deployment locations; therefore, the independent study model format provides service members the opportunity to complete assignments when conditions are the most favorable.

Tinto's Framework for Institutional Action for Student Success

According to Hunt (2006), except at the most highly selective colleges and universities, less-than-optimal retention and completion rates have been a weakness of American higher education. In the last decade, although some modest gains in completion rates have been made, far too many students who enrolled in higher education have failed to graduate (p. 3). Historically, the lack of progress in completion rates has indicated a need for improved college preparation. Although there have been improvements in preparation over the last decade, the improvements have not heightened completion rates; therefore, the focus must now be turned to the college experience itself, in particular to the quality of teaching and advising (p. 3).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Tinto (2012) associates four conditions with student success: expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement. In their pursuit of student success, institutions of higher education strive to be proactive and purposeful, developing effective and relevant plans of action to heighten student success. According to Tinto, to increase student retention, all four conditions must be present on college and university campuses; unfortunately, some colleges and universities invest in some conditions more than others do (p. 104).

While all four conditions are important for academic success, the data analysis showed that the condition most significant to this research study was involvement—specifically, academic involvement. When describing elements of academic involvement, the study participants first discussed the importance of timely communication and relationships with their professors. Because deployments are unpredictable, there must be timely communication between military students and their professors. Taking proactive measures, the participants emailed their professors during the first week of class, stating that they were deployed or scheduled for a deployment and discussing any potential challenges that they might face. For many participants, the professors were not only understanding but also accommodating. Despite the many challenges of deployment, the kindness and understanding of the professors was thoughtful and constructive and led to increased student engagement.

According to Tinto (2012), students who are academically connected with faculty and staff, reporting higher levels of contact, have been found to be more engaged, experiencing greater academic successes, thus leading to increased retention. The

participants who felt understood by—and therefore more connected to—faculty and staff demonstrated greater student success than participants who had experienced otherwise. Tinto states that, for heightened student success and increased retention, there must be an alignment of actions—one that is representative of collaboration and coordination among administrators, faculty, and staff (p. 112). “Nowhere is this collaboration more important than in the classroom and, therefore, among faculty and between faculty and staff” (p. 112). Faculty who are knowledgeable about and understanding toward deployed service members often translate their commitment to these students into meaningful outcomes. For example, the thoughtfulness and flexibility that faculty working with participants in this research study demonstrated were significant to the participants’ academic success.

As stated by Tinto (2012), “Student success does not arise by chance. Nor does substantial improvement in institutional rates of student retention and graduation. It is the result of intentional, structured, and proactive actions and policies directed toward the success of all students” (pp. 116-117). Tinto states that, by systematically addressing each of the four conditions—expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement—colleges and universities will influence and shape student success over the full course of student progression through the institutions (p. 117). Participants in this research study recognized colleges and universities that demonstrate a strong cognizance of the needs of deployed military students as being more understanding and supportive than others they had attended, resulting in greater student success and retention.

Recommendations for Practice

As discussed in Chapter 4, earning a college degree is important and often necessary for promotion within the U.S. military. In addition, should service members separate or retire from the military, a bachelor's degree increases their competitiveness and marketability; therefore, the importance of earning an education and degree cannot be underestimated for this population. The findings of this study show that, to best help these students achieve these goals, the following reference points pertaining to active-duty and deployed military students are important and worthy of consideration by those working in higher education:

- Deployments may be short- or no-notice deployments, constraining available time for academic work, at least temporarily.
- For U.S. service members, the mission is always the first priority.
- The living conditions of different deployment locations may present less-than-ideal learning environments.
- Limited Internet access and intermittent connectivity at various deployment locations are challenging to the completion of coursework.
- Factors such as the threat levels, weather, work schedules, and stress affect the quality of coursework.
- The choice of college and online class format are important to student success.
- The student-professor relationship is essential to academic success.

Aligning these reference points with Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Tinto's Framework for Institutional Action for Student Success may provide further insight into

designing initiatives, procedures, and policies that can best meet the needs of deployed military enrolled in higher education, thus increasing retention rates and individual success among this student population. The data analysis showed that, of the four elements of Schlossberg's 4S System, situation [deployment] was the most influential to retention and completion among deployed military students, and, of the four conditions in Tinto's Retention Model, involvement [faculty-student relationship] was the most influential.

According to Tinto, considerable improvement in a college's ability to encourage and promote academic and student success does not arise by chance (Tinto, 2012). Tinto states that, overall, student success is the result of purposeful, structured, and proactive strategies and actions that are applied consistently over time. The overall success of a college or university reflects the institution's ability "to improve, endure, and scale up over time in ways that are systematic and aligned to the achievement of the same goal: enhanced student retention and graduation" (p. 82). Based on the findings of this research study, recommendations for practice in four general areas—professional development, academic advising, student-faculty relationship, and distant education and online classes—may offer additional insight into effective strategies for both increased student success and retention among deployed military personnel.

Professional development. Often encouraged by faculty, student success is primarily a function of success in the classroom; therefore, as Tinto (2012) has stated, "It follows that any long-term strategy to enhance student retention must involve long-term investment in faculty development" (p. 87). Student success and achievement are results

of rigorous standards and a knowledgeable team of educators (National Education Association, n.d.). To have high standards for students, there must also be high standards for the educators working with the students (para. 2). Learning must be a continuous process: it does not end because an administrator or educator has earned an advanced degree. Professional development provides not only faculty but also administration and staff with opportunities to gain relevant and current knowledge that can result in greater student successes.

One of the most important elements in addressing the needs of military personnel enrolled in higher education is to offer strategic and effective professional development and training opportunities specific to functions and operations pertaining to active-duty military personnel, including deployment. To best serve deployed military students, there must be institutional commitment to understand how situation and involvement influence deployed service members and their pursuit of higher education. To accomplish this, professional development specifically addressing factors specific to deployment and the importance of the student-faculty relationship should be offered to administration, faculty, and staff. This research study and the studies discussed in Chapter 2, DiRamio et al. (2008), Livingston et al. (2011), Thomas (2010), Morreale (2011), Rumann (2010), and McDonald (2011) each identify the need for effective professional development opportunities.

One of the most significant and valuable approaches for gaining increased insight of deployed military students is offering professional development by way of a military student panel and focus groups. Personal stories from service members who have been

deployed while enrolled in higher education are of great value and more meaningful and credible than presentations given by those with little to no direct or substantive experience in the military. Deployed military personnel enrolled in higher education have experienced the challenges that various deployment locations present, first-hand. They have also experienced the student-faculty relationship, including varying levels of faculty involvement, and the ways in which this has influenced or affected their pursuit of higher education. Because of this, a military student panel and/or focus groups could be both important and valuable to those who want to genuinely learn about and understand the experiences of deployed military students enrolled in higher education.

Academic advising. For more than 10 years of qualitative research, Light (2001) visited 90 campuses across the country. The institutions were large and small private and public colleges as well as state universities and junior colleges. Some were highly selective, and others were close to having open admissions—most were in between with respect to selectivity. Light’s data analysis showed that faculty and students ranked effective academic advising as the number one challenge facing students (pp. 84-85). Both faculty and staff agreed that academic advising is significant to student success. Additionally, faculty and staff agreed that the best advising is tailored to each student’s unique situation, including the student’s background, strengths, areas in need of improvements, and goals (p. 85). Accordingly, Light (2001) concluded that “good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience” (p. 81).

Other researchers have also emphasized the importance of academic advising: “Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes” (“National: The Global Community,” 2006, para. 6). Furthermore, according to Drake (2011), effective academic advising may be the only opportunity for students to develop and establish a consistently supportive relationship while enrolled in higher education. Drake states that strong academic advising programs illustrate an “institution’s commitment to the success of its students and should never be left to the vagaries of chance” (p. 12). Strong academic advisors influence student persistence and retention by sharpening the students’ critical thinking and problem-solving skills—giving the students confidence to make strategic and thoughtful decisions about their educational goals.

For active-duty and deployed military personnel enrolled in colleges and universities, the presence of advisors with military experience may be a major factor contributing to overall academic success. Academic advisors with military experience may better understand the responsibilities of an active-duty service member as well as factors of deployments. These students are not traditional students, and it is of utmost importance for academic advisors to understand this significant fact when working with this student population. Working for the DoD, active-duty military personnel maintain full-time positions that require much focus, concentration, and commitment. In addition to these career responsibilities, deployment is an important factor to consider. Academic advisors must understand not only the responsibilities of the active-duty service member

stationed stateside, but also the different elements of deployment. Oftentimes, these troops may be deployed overseas to locations that present challenges for those pursuing higher education. Academic advisors who are well informed of the responsibilities of active-duty service members stateside and of the potential challenging factors of deployment will be more effective and successful in an advising role.

Forward movement and progress have been made across the nation in addressing these issues, and some campuses have created specific staff positions or departments whose primary purpose is to serve student veterans. The dedicated veteran positions and departments have proven to be of significant value, as they offer service members specialized resources and tools needed to achieve their educational goals. However, while specific student veteran representatives and departments are essential to service members' academic success, it is important that their presence not deter or discourage a campus from ensuring that all faculty and staff are knowledgeable about and understanding of veteran, active-duty, and deployed military students (Cook & Kim, 2009).

Even though some campuses have programs specifically designed for military students, few have key administrative and student support representatives such as academic advisors specifically in place to work with student veterans (Cook & Kim, 2009). Programs and services are more general and offered to the entire student population through central academic affairs offices rather than separated by veteran/civilian student status (p. 28). Academic advisors are responsible for curricula and academic guidance; therefore, they are essential to student success. To be most

effective, academic advisors assigned to military students must be knowledgeable about all aspects of the military that affect educational pursuits, including deployments.

Student-faculty relationship. The data analysis showed that all study participants discussed the importance of student-faculty relationships and the significance of effective communication. As discussed throughout this study, deployment is unpredictable; therefore, it is essential that deployed military students have effective and timely communication with their professors. For study participants, relationships with faculty contributed to their academic and overall student success. According to Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014), for faculty-student success, the relationship does not need to be overly complex, nor is there a need for a sophisticated theoretical framework.

Cook-Sather et al. (2014) state that “student-faculty partnerships rooted in the principles of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility are most powerful and efficacious” and that respect, reciprocity, and responsibility are foundational to any genuine relationship, including student-faculty relationships (p. 2). All three of these principles require and encourage trust, attention, and responsiveness, principles that are significant to the success of deployed military students.

The first principle, respect, is relevant to the student-faculty relationship because it calls for willingness and readiness to consider experiences and perspectives that may be different from our own (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Professors may not have had personal military experience; therefore, they may be less informed of the experiences that service members face. Individual professors may be opposed to certain political or military actions and, as a result, may be less encouraged to establish relationships with military

students. Achieving authentic respect requires a willingness among faculty to learn about and understand the wide-ranging experiences of military students.

Cook-Sather et al. (2014), state that the second principle, reciprocity, is closely connected with respect and that, by way of interaction, reciprocity is a process of give-and-take. The interaction and relationship between faculty and student may entail differing perspectives and experiences. Such differences often make the student-faculty relationship rich and diverse (p. 4). Service members, especially deployed service members, experience conditions and situations that challenge their well-being emotionally, mentally, psychologically, and physically. Deployed military personnel have perceived and experienced the world in a way that many of us have not. For faculty working with military students, there is great opportunity to learn of differing perspectives and experiences, thus resulting in an insightful and enlightening relationship.

According to Cook-Sather et al. (2014), responsibility, the third principle, is a prerequisite for, as well as an outcome of, the student-faculty relationship. Shared responsibility is defined by reliability and trustworthiness and is essential for a productive student-faculty relationship (p. 5). In the U.S. military, reliability, and trustworthiness are important and fundamental characteristics that all service members must demonstrate. When military students and faculty are equally invested in the student-faculty relationship, an engaging and supportive learning environment can result, even in the face of deployment.

The participants in this research study were not expecting to be deeply involved in a relationship with and take an extraordinary amount of time of their professors or to

have detailed assessments and feedback of each assignment, but rather, they were hoping that their professors would demonstrate an understanding of the challenges deployment presents. It was simple communication and understanding that the participants were after. They did not ask for special favors, but simply explained the circumstances of the deployment that might challenge their completion and submission of assignments, hoping that their professors would understand and provide some level of flexibility.

Distant education programs and online classes. Distant education programs and online classes continue to increase across college campuses. Many for-profit colleges and universities are known for focusing heavily on providing distant education programs, but private nonprofit and public universities are gaining ground. According to Blumenstyk, “By the end of 2013, at least 87% of the United States population will have the option of taking online courses from an in-state public or nonprofit college” (2013, p. 1). Results of the 2013 Babson Survey Research Group’s annual survey of more than 2,800 colleges and universities showed that the number of postsecondary students enrolled in an online class had increased over a 9-year period, from 1.6 million in 2002 to 6.7 million in 2011 (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

For active-duty military personnel enrolled in higher education, the availability and flexibility of distant education programs and online classes are significant to academic success. In this research study, participants discussed the importance and significance of online classes. For deployed students, online classes are essential—residential classes are not often a practical or realistic option. Online classes afford an opportunity to complete classes in a way that is more conducive to the deployment

location, conditions, and policies than other types of classes would be. Additionally, participants discussed the advantages of an online class based on an independent study model that offers deployed military students increased flexibility.

It is important for colleges and universities to consider the benefits and value presented by distant education programs. According to the 2013 Babson Survey Report, approximately 70% of colleges and universities reported that online education is essential to their long-term strategy (Allen & Seaman, 2013). As institutions of higher education continue to recognize the value of distant education, more colleges and universities have moved from offering only online classes to offering complete online degree programs (p. 20). Colleges and universities offering complete online degree programs provide deployed military students with a flexible opportunity to earn a degree, an achievement that is of high value, both personally and professionally.

Recommendations for Future Research

In recent literature, military educational benefits and transition challenges from veteran to civilian have been researched and well documented. Additionally, the impacts of deployment—specifically, the effects of war-zone experiences such as PTSD and TBIs among military personnel and veterans—have received much attention. This study was not intended to diminish the importance of these topics, but rather to add to the existing literature regarding the challenges that the active-duty military population faces as students in higher education and identify ways to better address these challenges. To best serve active-duty and deployed military students, it is important for further and continued research to occur.

Increased scope of sampling of military students. As discussed in Chapter 1, the sample size for this study was small, potentially limiting generalizations of the findings to other deployed military students enrolled in higher education. A participant sample that is larger and more diverse may yield further data thus providing greater context to the research study. Future researchers may find value in increasing the sample size and in purposefully choosing a sample of varying demographics, including gender, enlisted military personnel and officers, and participants representing all branches of the U.S. military.

Inclusion of instructors in research sampling. Researchers may also find value in talking with professors who have prior military experience, including deployments. These professors understand the distinct needs of military students and the conditions of deployments, as well as the more universal requirements for academic success. This combined understanding may offer researchers further insight into the best and most relevant practices, resulting in increased academic success among this student population. Additionally, it may be important for future researchers to carry out discussions with professors without any prior military experience. Learning of the challenges these professors may face in genuinely understanding this student population may result in more focused and relevant professional development opportunities.

Another important area for future research is discussions with those professors currently working with active-duty military students. Talking with professors who have experienced teaching either face-to-face or online classes to active-duty military students can offer further understanding of this student population. As discussed by Collier (n.d.),

professors may have the opportunity not only to teach online classes to military students, but also to travel with them. For example, one educator, an online and traveling college instructor, teaches face-to-face classes aboard Navy ships, often on 8-week tours of duty, traveling halfway around the world. Additionally, while onboard, she teaches online classes to deployed military personnel in Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan (p. 1).

According to Collier (n.d.), working closely with service members has given this instructor important and applicable hands-on experience. She is well aware of the potential challenges that deployed military personnel may face while pursuing higher education, and she understands those actions and practices that are most effective in lessening the challenges. For example, as this instructor has discussed, the most important characteristic for a residential or online active-duty military professor working with active-duty military students is flexibility (Collier, n.d.). As examples of why flexibility is essential, she has noted that a duty assignment or mission may require service members to be away from class for a certain period and that intermittent Internet connectivity can create challenges (p. 2). Discussions with professors with a strong working knowledge and understanding of active-duty military students will add value to the current literature.

Concluding Reflections

I am grateful and honored to have had the opportunity to talk with military service members who demonstrate such resilience and strength in working toward academic goals while fulfilling strenuous requirements of active military service. These service members are patriotic, loyal, and dutiful, holding steadfast to protecting American

freedoms. They carried out the requirements of the deployment missions with fortitude and commitment, working in an atmosphere of uncertainty and, often, of threat.

Additionally, these service members were humble and grateful for the opportunity to pursue higher education while on active duty. I hope that we educators continue to appreciate the tremendous sacrifices made by our service members and take significant new strides to ease their ability to achieve the education that they deserve so well.

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Appendix A

Consent to be Contacted for Research Projects

Consent to be Contacted for Research Projects

As a member or veteran of the U.S. military, I am willing to be contacted regarding participation in research projects conducted by _____ University which need input from military or veteran populations. I understand that I may be contacted by phone and/or email, and the method of research may vary. Participation in all research projects is voluntary. I understand that I can contact _____ University's Director of Military Veteran Service's Center, (name), at (email address), or (phone number) if I no longer want to be contacted.

If you are willing to be contacted to take part in research projects from a military or veteran perspective, please sign below.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Preferred phone number

Preferred email address

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Title of Project:

Understanding the Pursuit of Higher Education among Active Duty Military Personnel in the Face of Deployment Using the Lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how active duty military personnel describe their higher education experiences while being deployed.

Procedures:

With your permission, participation in this study will require approximately 30-45 minutes of interview time. The interview will be conducted in a private and confidential office at the Military-Veteran Services Center at . For transcription purposes, the interview will be audio recorded. Example questions asked in the interview include both demographic and open-ended questions such as the questions below:

- What branch of the military are you currently serving in? (Or if in the Reserves, separated, or retired, what branch did you serve in?)
- Where are you currently stationed? (Or if in the Reserves, separated, or retired, where were you most recently stationed?)
- What grade do you currently hold in the military? (Or if in the Reserves, separated or retired, what grade do you hold?)
- Please discuss your reasons for joining the military.
- Please describe the reasons why you decided to pursue higher education?
- In your discussion of the stressors, challenges or factors you experienced while being deployed, did any of these specifically affect or influence your learning, studying, or completion of assignments?
- From your experiences, please discuss the benefit to pursuing higher education while deployed?

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There is a potential for minimal risk associated with this research study. Because of the nature of the interview questions, specifically those related to deployment, there is a possibility these questions may be emotional or upsetting. If at any time during the interview, you do not want to address a question, you may choose to skip the question and move forward. Also, you may take a break at any time during the interview. In the event of problems resulting from participation in the study, counseling services, free of charge are available at the Military-Veteran Services Center at . For services, please contact

**Benefits:**

The information gained from this study will provide a greater understanding of the pursuit of higher education and deployment among deployed active duty military personnel.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office and will be seen only by the primary researcher and supervisory chair during the study and for five years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but the data will be reported as aggregated data. Your real name will never be used.

Compensation:

You will receive \$20.00 for your participation in this research study.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. In addition, you may call me, the primary researcher, or my supervisory chair at any time per the listed phone numbers on this letter. Sometimes participants have questions or concerns about their rights. In that case, please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at 402-472-6965 or irb@unl.edu.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate after having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

----- Initial if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

Name and Phone number of researchers:

Marcia Brown, Primary Researcher
Dr. James Griesen, Supervisory Chair and Secondary Researcher

Phone:
Office:

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Name: _____

Date of interview: _____

Introductory Statement:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview process. Through this research study, I am interested in understanding the experiences of deployed active duty military personnel enrolled in higher education. Your responses will be recorded and transcribed word for word. This must be done verbatim to assure that I do not paraphrase your thoughts, which could lead to an incorrect interpretation on my part. Your answers reflect your experiences and perspectives, and because of this, there are no right or wrong answers. During the interview, if you need clarification, have a question, or need to stop the interview for any reason, please let me know. Do you have any questions or concerns before beginning the interview?

Demographic Questions:

- 1) What branch of the military are you currently serving in? (Or if in the Reserves, separated, or retired, what branch did you serve in?)
- 2) Where are you currently stationed? (Or if in the Reserves, separated, or retired, where were you most recently stationed?)
- 3) What grade do you currently hold in the military? (Or if in the Reserves, separated or retired, what grade do you hold?)
- 4) How many years have you been in the military? (Or if in the Reserves, separated or retired, how many years did you serve active duty in the military?)
- 5) What college or university do you attend, or did you attend?
- 6) Are or were you an undergraduate or graduate student?
- 7) Please describe the format of your classes: residential, online, or blended?

Interview Questions:

- 1) Please discuss your reasons for joining the military?
- 2) Please describe the reasons why you decided to pursue higher education?
- 3) When choosing your major, what factors did you consider?

- 4) I understand you have limitations in discussing deployment and/or war zones; however, will you please describe as much as possible about the following factors of deployment?
- a. Have you experienced short- or no-notice deployments? Please describe the timing of the deployment(s).
 - b. As much as possible, please describe the location of your deployment(s).
 - c. Please describe the type of living conditions you experienced while being deployed.
 - d. In thinking about your overall well-being and safety while being deployed, please describe your feelings regarding your physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.
 - e. Please describe your deployment schedule to include work, school, social activities, sleep, diet, and exercise.
 - f. During your deployment, did family separation present challenges? Please discuss why or why not.
 - g. Please identify and discuss any additional factors or stressors you experienced while being deployed.
- 5) In your discussion of the stressors, challenges or factors you experienced while being deployed, did any of these specifically affect or influence your learning, studying, or completion of assignments? If so, please describe.
- 6) From your experiences, please discuss the benefits of pursuing higher education while on active duty?
- 7) From your experiences, are higher ranking military personnel supportive of your pursuit of higher education? Please describe why or why not? (Or if in the Reserves, separated or retired, were higher ranking military personnel supportive of your pursuit of higher education? Please describe why or why not?)
- 8) If you are currently serving, as you move forward with your higher educational goals, will you remain in the military? Please discuss why or why not?
- 9) While active duty, was there ever a time that you considered putting your education on hold? If so, please explain why.

Closing Statement:

Thank you for participating in my research study. All of your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and any information I use in my study will not identify you as the respondent.

Thank you for your time, and thank you for your service.

End of Interview Protocol

Appendix D

Survey Email

Dear Military Service Member,

Thank you for your service to our country. As a military spouse, I understand the seriousness of your obligation and the sacrifices made by you and your families.

As a doctoral student in the Educational Administration program at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln, I am completing a research project and writing to ask for your participation in a brief survey. The purpose of my research is to gain a greater understanding of the deployed military student enrolled in higher education.

If you are currently serving or have served in the military while being enrolled in a college or university within the last five years, would you please consider completing the survey?

The survey can be completed in less than 10 minutes. To access the survey, please click on the link below, or copy and paste the entire URL into your browser.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/3PYPYVJ>

The survey will be available until Tuesday, June 24, 2014.

Your name and all answers will be kept strictly confidential used only for the purposes of my research study. If you have questions about the survey, please call or email me.

Thank you for your time.

Marcía Brown
Principal Researcher – UNL

Appendix E

Survey Consent Form

Title of Project:

Understanding the Pursuit of Higher Education among Active Duty Military Personnel in the Face of Deployment Using the Lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this research study is to understand how active duty military personnel describe their higher education experiences while being deployed. If you are 19 years of age or older, and if you are or were at one time active duty military personnel and enrolled in higher education while deployed, please consider completing the survey.

Procedures:

The survey can be completed in 10 minutes or less. From the survey responses, I will identify and contact military service members who meet the research guidelines for this study and who are interested and willing to be interviewed. The interview will be a semi-structured interview consisting of specific demographic and open-ended questions and will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. Each interview will be conducted individually in a private and confidential office at the Military-Veteran Services Center at University. All data and responses from the individuals that are not selected for interviews will be deleted through SurveyMonkey and not used in the results.

Risks and Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with completing the survey.

Benefits:

The information gained from this study will provide a greater understanding of the pursuit of higher education and deployment among deployed active duty military personnel.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research at any time by contacting Marcía Brown, Primary Researcher at _____ or _____. You may also contact Dr. James Griesen, Secondary Researcher at _____ or _____. If you would like to speak to someone else, please call the Research Compliance Services Office at 402-472-6965 or irb@unl.edu.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, _____ University, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By clicking on the I Accept button below, your consent to participate is implied. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Appendix F

Survey

Research Survey Questions

1. What is your current military status?

Army
Navy
Marine Corps
Air Force
Coast Guard

Active
Reserve
National Guard
Inactive Reserve
Separated
Retired

2. What is your current grade?

E1	O1
E2	O2
E3	O3
E4	O4
E5	O5
E6	O6
E7	O7
E8	O8
E9	O9
	O10

3. Please mark your gender.

Male
Female

4. Have you been deployed outside of the Continental United States while pursuing higher education? Please mark the degree(s) you were working towards while being deployed.

Associate's Degree
 Bachelor's Degree
 Master's Degree
 Doctorate Degree
 Other

N/A – I have not been deployed outside of the Continental United States while enrolled in higher education.

5. During which year(s) were you deployed. Please mark all that apply.

2013 2009
 2012 2008
 2011 Other year(s) _____
 2010

N/A – I have not been deployed outside of the Continental United States while enrolled in higher education.

6. Were you enrolled in a college course(s) at the time of deployment?

1 course
 2 courses
 3 courses
 4+ courses

N/A – I have not been deployed outside of the Continental United States while enrolled in higher education.

7. Please identify the number of course(s) successfully completed during deployment.

1 course
 2 courses
 3 courses
 4+ courses

N/A – I have not been deployed outside of the Continental United States while enrolled in higher education.

8. Would you be willing to participate in this research study and allow me to interview you for approximately 30-45 minutes? The interviews would be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you and may be completed at _____ University in the Military-Veteran Services Center.

Yes - Please provide your name and the best telephone number for contacting you to arrange an interview.

No -

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey and considering my request for an interview.

Marcía Brown
Principal Researcher – UNL

Appendix G

Phone Script

Phone Script

Hi. My name is Marcia Brown, and I'm a doctoral student from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. You recently completed a brief on-line survey for my research project about active duty military personnel, deployment, and higher education – thank you for completing the survey.

From your survey responses, you indicated you would be willing to participate in an interview. If you are still interested, I would like to schedule an interview with you at your convenience. The interview would be conducted at the Military-Veterans Services Center at _____ University.

Interested: Great. Is there a day and time that works best for you? Ok, thank you. Should you need to reschedule, please don't hesitate to contact me _____ or _____

Also, do you have any questions you would like answered now?

If you think of any questions that you want answered before your interview, you may contact me at any time, _____ or my supervisory chair, Dr. James Griesen, _____. If you prefer to speak with someone else, please call the UNL Research Compliance Services Office at 402-472-6965 or irb@unl.edu.

See you on (Date) and (Time). Thank you. Good-bye.

Not interested: Thank you for taking time to complete the survey, and thank you for your service.

Good-bye.

Appendix H

Participant Demographics

	Branch	Enlisted or Officer	Rank	Most Current Duty Title	Status	Major
Participant 1	Air Force	Enlisted	E-4 Senior Airman	Aerospace Propulsion Specialist	Active Duty	Business Management
Participant 2	Air Force	Enlisted	E-5 Staff Sergeant	Guidance and Control Specialist	Active Duty	Computer Information Systems
Participant 3	Air Force	Enlisted	E-4 Senior Airman	Security Forces	Separated	Business Administration
Participant 4	Air Force	Enlisted	E-6 Technical Sergeant	Aircraft Crew Chief	Retired	Cybersecurity
Participant 5	Army Reserves	Enlisted	E-5 Sergeant	All Source Intelligence Analysis	Active Duty	Legal Studies
Participant 6	Air Force	Enlisted	E-7 Master Sergeant	Aircraft Production Superintendent	Active Duty	Professional Aeronautics
Participant 7	Air Force	Enlisted	E-7 Master Sergeant	Superintendent, Chaplain Operations	Retired	Library Science
Participant 8	Air Force	Enlisted	E-5 Staff Sergeant	Aircraft Crew Chief	Active Duty	Administrative Leadership
Participant 9	Air Force	Officer	O-2 1 st Lieutenant	Aircraft Maintenance Officer	Active Duty	International Security and Intelligence Studies
Participant 10	Air Force	Enlisted	E-7 Master Sergeant	Aircraft Production Superintendent	Active Duty	Professional Aeronautics

Appendix I

Theme and Code Table

Theme Code Table

<i>Active-Duty Military Students Pursuing Higher Education While Deployed</i>	
Four Themes	
Themes	Codes
Challenges to Pursuing Higher Education While on Deployment	Mission First Short or No-Notice Deployments Living Conditions
Internet-Related Challenges to Completing Coursework While on Deployment	Connectivity to the Internet Limited Access to the Internet
Challenges to Focus and Concentration While on Deployment	Weather Work Schedules Lack of Sleep Stress
Proactiveness and Responsibility of the Service Members	Choice of College Communication with Professors

Appendix J

External Audit Attestation

External Audit Attestation
Ronald J. Shope, PhD

Acknowledgements

Note: The auditor is indebted to Dr. Dana Miller who provided an example of a dissertation audit attestation. The procedure used in the audit of Marcia Brown's thesis was developed by Dr. Dana Miller in 1996 and is based on the work of Lincoln and Guba. The format for this attestation was taken from an attestation used by Dr. Miller to audit a dissertation in November of 1996.

Audit Attestation

Marcia Brown requested that I complete a methodological audit of her qualitative thesis entitled, *Understanding the pursuit of higher education among active duty military personnel in the face of deployment, using the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory*. The audit was conducted between October 24, 2014 and November 17, 2014. The purpose of the audit was to determine the extent to which the results of the study are trustworthy.

Lincoln and Guba (1995) in their book, *Naturalistic Inquiry* note that the audit "may be the single most important trustworthiness technique available to the naturalist" (p. 283). They note that the audit is "based metaphorically on the fiscal audit" (p. 317). The role of the auditor is to carefully examine both the process and the product of the inquiry. It is essential, therefore, that the researcher maintains careful detailed records regarding the research process throughout the process. This provides the "paper trail" for the auditor to validate qualitative method and procedures.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) note two essential tasks associated with the audit process. These are as follows: 1) An examination of the Process of inquiry to ensure that the participants are represented fairly in recorded accounts; and 2) An Examination of the final Product to ensure that it is accurate and the findings are supported by the data.

Prior to the audit, Marcia was emailed a checklist of materials that would be required for the audit. The researcher delivered a portfolio of materials as well documents attached to emails for the audit. These materials contained documents that provided the basis to evaluate the process of inquiry as well as the accuracy of the final thesis.

Audit Procedures

The audit consisted of the following steps:

1. Reviewing all catalogued materials in the audit checklist. Notes regarding the contents of the materials are included below.
2. Coding four transcripts using Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software and noting possible emerging themes from the transcripts. The transcripts provided represent about 40% of the total transcripts used in the project. The coding of the transcripts took place before the reading of the analysis section in Chapter 4 of the thesis to ensure that my analysis was not influenced by the themes and summary of the results that were in the thesis. Following my analysis of the sample transcripts my analysis was compared with the analysis presented by the author in Chapter 4.
4. Reading of the electronic copy of the dissertation final draft entitled, *Understanding the pursuit of higher education among active duty military personnel in the face of deployment, using the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory* (ND). Chapters 1-3 were read first. Then, the four sample transcripts were analyzed for codes and themes. Following the analysis, Chapters 4 and 5 were read to compare the author's results with the analysis I had prior to reading Chapter 4.
5. Review of all of the materials, recording notes, and formulated conclusions regarding the trustworthiness of the audit trail and findings.
6. Write and submitted the signed attestation to the researcher.

Review of Audit Materials:

Raw Data

- Interview transcripts (10). Each transcript contains essential header information, and is single spaced. Lines are not numbered. Interview questions labeled “I:” and the participant’s responses are labeled with an “R” and responses are singled spaced paragraphs below the question.
- 4 complete transcripts for review
- Survey Data from 10 participants

Data Reduction and Analysis Products

- Transcripts were coded using by hand and were organized in a notebook. There was a color scheme that was used for coding using colored tabs. There was an index on the first page of the notebook that detailed the color scheme and the segments of text were coded using color tabs next to the text segment.
- Theme and Code Table (Appendix I of Dissertation)

Data Reconstruction and Synthesis Products

- Library Information (ND)
- Initial Thoughts (ND)
- Focused Thoughts (ND)
- Draft 1 Initial Thoughts/Ideas (ND)
- Draft 2 of Chapter 1 (ND)

Process Notes

- Dissertation Proposal Overview (ND)
- Methodology (ND)
- Research Problem and Questions (ND)
- Data Analysis Strategy (ND)

Materials Related to Researcher Intentions/Dispositions

- IRB Approval Documents
 - UNL IRB Approval letter for project # 20140414277EP Dated April 16, 2014
- Copy of IRB Project Protocol NU Grant Project ID 14277
- Letter approving Change in Protocol for acceptance of the _____ University Permissions Dated July 24, 2014
- _____ University IRB Approval Letter Dated May 30, 2014 IRB #2014.10
- 10 Signed Informed Consent Forms from participants
- CITI Human Research Completed Report Printed on January 11, 2013
- Survey Email (Appendix D of Dissertation)
- Phone Script (Appendix G of Dissertation)

Information Relative to Instrument Development

- Interview Protocol First Draft
- Interview Protocol Final Draft (Also contained in Dissertation in Appendix C)
- Survey (Appendix F of Dissertation)

Conclusions

Having catalogued and reviewed the materials outlined in this audit, I submit the following conclusions:

1. It is the auditor's opinion that the data analysis supports the Central question for the study which is: . . .*to understand how deployed active duty military students described their pursuit of higher education.* In addition, the data appears to support the four sub-questions which are: *1. What are the motivations or reasons why active duty military service members pursue higher education while being deployed?; 2. How do deployed active duty military students describe their educational pursuits?; 3. What challenges or stressors do active duty military students face while being deployed?; 4. What types of support do active duty military students receive from college or university administrators, faculty, and military educational services?; 5. What types of support do active duty military students receive from higher-ranking military personnel?*

The Central Question and Research Questions were consistent in the Dissertation Proposal (Page 53) and the Dissertation (Pages 53-54).

I also cross-checked the following methodological procedures for consistency:

- a. Sampling strategies:
 Proposal: Page 54
 Dissertation: Pages 54-55
- b. Data Collection Strategies
 Proposal: Page 55
 Dissertation: Pages 55-56
- c. Data Analysis Procedures
 Proposal: Page 57
 Dissertation: Page 57
- d. Verification Procedures
 Proposal: Page 58
 Dissertation: Pages 58-59

2. It is this auditor's assessment that the trustworthiness of the study can be established through both the process and product of this study. After independently coding a sample of the transcripts I conclude that the Themes in Chapter 4 and the Summary of the Findings in Chapter 5 are

supported by the data. The researcher's analytic process is detailed in the thesis and the materials submitted in the review. Documentation of the research process indicated that an acceptable qualitative research process was followed and there is evidence of the development of the product over time. The researcher provided the reader with the background of each of the participants in Chapter 4 of the dissertation. The sampling methods and data analysis procedures in Chapter 3 are consistent with qualitative research. There is evidence that the themes and sub themes, including a table of codes and themes in Appendix I are supported by the interview data.

3. Although the issue of "reliability" (in its traditional definition) is problematic for qualitative researchers, and generalizability from specific cases may be limited, the process of the audit demonstrated that the researcher maintained an acceptable audit trail. While the additional materials regarding the research process, such as a researcher journal, and additional materials in the area of data reconstruction such as additional drafts of the analysis and summary sections and drafts of code tables would have been desirable, the materials submitted for the audit met the minimum requirements for an audit trail and provided sufficient evidence that qualitative procedures were followed.

Attested to by Ronald J. Shope this 17th Day of November 2014.

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