

A HERO'S WELCOME:
HELPING VETERANS AT SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY MAKE A
SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to translate into actionable information the issues faced by student Veteransⁱ transitioning to college from military life after deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation New Dawn (OND), as they reclaim civilian identity and pursue higher education. Additionally, the project seeks to provide insight into how San Jose State University (SJSU) supports its student Veterans and make practical recommendations on how services and programs could improve to better meet their needs. A report documenting the analysis, the findings, and recommendations will be submitted to the Veterans Advisory Committee (VAC), the SJSU President's office, and to the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) initiative at SJSU.

The analysis in this project informs how SJSU can be more welcoming toward Veterans, and can support them as they pursue their goals of becoming productive members of society post-military. This project will benefit student Veterans in making a successful transition to higher education and a smoother reintegration into civilian society.

In this project, I: (1) identified Veterans of OIF and OEF enrolled in a four year college program post-deployment to a war zone; (2) interviewed these individuals using a semi-structured interview instrument reviewed and approved by the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at SJSU; (3) analyzed the interview materials by enumerating the emerging recurrent ideas and elaborating on the

actionable insights drawn from the interviews; (4) prepared and submitted this report to the Department of Anthropology that presents findings and lessons learned through iterative engagement with various stakeholders on the SJSU campus.

In this report, I discuss the genesis of this project, the subsequent changes in the goals and the audience that this project seeks to inform; the methodology, the theoretical framework, the recurrent ideas emerging from the analysis, actionable recommendations based on this analysis, and suggestions for future action and inquiry.

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I thank Dr. Trisha Vinateri and Dr. Annabel Prins of the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) initiative at SJSU for helping frame the insights into improving the student Veteran experience that would be actionable within the SJSU context. I thank Dr. Charles Darrah for his perspectives on improving the construction and format of this report.

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STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This report is divided into five parts. The first part discusses the goals and objectives of this project. It details the sampling techniques, the interview instrument and provides a brief introduction to the project participants. The second, third, and fourth parts discuss recurrent ideas emerging from my interview data, as informed and corroborated by other scholarly research on the topic (see DiRamio et al. 2008; Carne 2011; Demers 2013). These ideas, or themes, include identity formation in the journey from civilian to service member (Moskos 1977) to student (Carne 2011) that the project participants have taken. They cover the hindrances to, and the help provided for, a successful academic experience through engagement with faculty and staff (Tinto 1987; Freeman et al. 2007). They contain the need for support networks through other Veterans on campus, family and friends in easing the transition to higher education (Glass et al. 1974; Institute of Medicine 2013).

Within the chapters exploring these themes, I weave in anthropological and sociological theory that provides the lens through which I analyze my interview data. The topic of successful integration of student Veterans on campus straddles across various academic fields, and therefore requires a multi-disciplinary framework to do it justice. Many of the stakeholders in this project, such as VITAL, already draw upon social science disciplines beyond anthropology, and so I include theoretical frameworks from the fields of education and psychology in addition to those from anthropology.

Jones and McEwen's model for multiple identities informs how my project participants define their roles as service members, students, and other social identities that they strive to seamlessly integrate into their lives. I also use the theoretical approaches of phenomenology to understand how the Veterans already enrolled at SJSU create meaning out of their multiple identities; and more specifically, examine how they are likely to construct meaning of their educational experiences towards reclaiming civilian identity.

The final theoretical framework I apply is the 4 S framework developed by Goodman et al. I use this framework to systematically understand how the military to student transition occurs through the categories of **S**ituation, **S**elf, **S**upport and **S**trategies. This framework suggests that individuals are socially situated and support structures developed should directly map on to the student Veteran experience.

The fifth and final part contains lessons learned, and provides recommendations resulting from this project. It suggests some directions for future research and inquiry that could branch out from this report.

Chapter 1: The Project

On August 31, 2010, President Obama declared the end of US combat operations in Iraq. He also declared that US troops would pull out of Afghanistan as well by 2016. However, in October 2015, in response to the geo-political upheaval caused by the Taliban in the region, President Obama announced that military forces will continue to stay in that country beyond 2016. The Global War on Terror (GWOT), including Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) has been the longest sustained U.S. military operation since the Vietnam era, sending more than 2.2 million troops into battle, and resulting in more than 6,600 deaths and 48,000 injuries (Institute of Medicine 2013). While the vast majority of service members returning from these conflicts are relatively unscathed, others return with varied complex health conditions. They find that readjusting to life at home and reconnecting with family and friends is an uphill struggle.

In this process of reintegration, education can play a big role in the transition from service member to civilian. Indeed, many Veterans who have returned are currently either exploring or utilizing the educational benefits that were likely a primary motivator to enlisting in the first place. Almost a million returning Veterans are already using their benefits from the Post-9/11 GI Bill which provides financial support for education as well as housing while in college (Kirkwood 2014).

However, the transition from life in the military to life as a student is challenging. As evidenced through my own research, service members face psychological and physical injuries from the war and feel bereft of the structured environment once provided by the military in their years in service. They feel olderⁱⁱ than their peers in college and miss the camaraderie of their military unit. They have to relearn skills such as studying for tests and writing papers that may have been under-utilized in their years away from student life.

Moreover, the recent wars have been described as unconventional warfare (Herd 2005, Record 2003). Multiple deployments, the lack of a definite adversary, and clandestine guerilla warfare tactics using Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) define the current “wars on terror”. Navigating these atypical warzones makes the service members’ experiences more complex, and subsequently renders reintegration that much harder. Disabilities caused due to the wars, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), depression, and physical and sensory impairments hamper the smooth transition to civilian life. Today’s Veterans have the highest rates of mental distress of any previous groups of Veterans, distress based on experiences and losses, but that may also include feelings of shame and guilt for what they have witnessed and what they have been asked to do (Budden 2009, Hautzinger and Scandlyn 2013:60). These complexities further add to the challenges that educators face in facilitating effective reintegration through their institutions (Armstrong et al. 2006, Cantrell & Dean 2007).

The unemployment rates for OIF and OEF Veterans range from 9.7% (Reickhoff 2012) to 30.2% (Institute of Medicine 2013). Both figures are considerably higher than the national average of 5.3% (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015). Successful reintegration into society will enable these Veterans to become productive members of society post-military. Education can be an important pathway to realizing one's dreams. This need to make the transition smoother has made it imperative for colleges and universities to become better prepared to educate and empower Veterans to pursue personal and professional goals. Veterans' educational benefits affirm that such access is their right as citizens of a nation for which they have made heavy sacrifices.

In order to ascertain how college, and specifically San Jose State University, is supporting student Veterans, and what services might be unavailable or in need of improvement, I needed to gain an in-depth understanding of student Veterans' own perceptions on their college experience and their transition from military to student life. I determined that I could come to this understanding through analyzing data collected via in-depth, open-ended interviewing with student Veterans. To maintain a sharper focus on the topic that I was exploring, I determined domains that would be relevant to the project and developed questions relating to these targeted domains. These domains are consistent with the issues raised by other scholars of the student Veteran experience on other college campuses across the country, (DiRamio et al. 2008; Carne 2011) and I wished to explore their applicability to the SJSU campus.

The interview instrument was developed under the guidance of my academic advisor, Dr. Jan English-Lueck. I needed to elicit the student Veterans' background information, their experiences with their institution of higher learning, and the methods they employed in learning. I also needed to probe into how they navigated their identities as they transitioned from military to student life, and how they used their support networks as they experienced this transition. Additionally, I allowed for the opportunity to talk about topics that the participant wanted to explore, elaborate on or felt were missed during the interview.

Because of the use of pre-formulated domains, the anthropological method I used was the semi-structured interview. The advantages of the semi-structured interview method are that even as it provides directionality and agenda, there are no correct or wrong answers to the questions asked (Schensul et al. 1999). This allows participants to verbally express themselves to the extent that they are comfortable. It also gives them the freedom to define the boundaries around the questions and narrow or expand them as they see fit.

This report draws on semi-structured interviews conducted from March to May of 2011 with 13 OIF/OEF Veterans attending college to understand what is working for this population, and what can be improved to make higher education a better experience for them, and others like them who have served our country in two very demanding wars. While the client report coming out of this project focuses on recommendations specifically for SJSU, I thought it well-suited to examine both similarities and differences with student Veterans on campuses

other than SJSU's in trying to understand issues faced by this group. Therefore, of these 13 Veterans, 10 were enrolled at SJSU, 1 at Stanford University, 1 at a local community college, and 1 at a private for-profit college at the time of the interviews. To include how the transition process might affect female Veterans differently from their male counterparts, participants included 2 female Veterans.

The interview instrument, along with a statement of purpose for the project, and supporting documents were submitted for review and approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at SJSU. Once I received the approval from the IRB, I conducted a pilot study with one participant to gauge the need for further refining the instrument. Since the interview went smoothly, I decided not to make any changes to the instrument and used it in the final approved form. The instrument has been attached as Appendix A to the end of this report.

I used electronic mail and flyers to reach out to potential project participants. The email and the flyer were identical, and contained the project objective and participant eligibility information. The request for participants is attached as Appendix B to the end of this report. Participants had to have returned from deployment to OEF/OIF, had to be enrolled at college, and had to have finished at least one semester before the interview. Flyers were posted to notice boards housed in the Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) library on the SJSU campus, and also in several department buildings in areas heavily trafficked by students. To reach a broader pool of potential interview participants, I requested

Andre Ingalla, the VA coordinator on the SJSU campus at the time, to distribute the email using his distribution list for student Veterans enrolled in the university.

I also sent the email to the coordinator of the Veteran's Club at Stanford University to recruit more participants from that university which would enable a comparison between Veterans' perceptions of SJSU versus a private, nonprofit institution. I reached out to Veterans' clubs at Diablo Valley College, Foothill College and De Anza College, all local community colleges as well, but did not get a timely response from the groups at these colleges. Finally, I also advertised the project and the need for participants by word of mouth. In this manner, I recruited 13 participants for this study. This number is suitable for ethnographic and phenomenological research as long as they yield analytical saturation- that is, insights begin to get repetitive as recurrent ideas emerge from the data (Guest et al. 2006).

Participants

With the approval of the University Institutional Review Board (IRB), a total of 13 participants were recruited from OIF/OEF Veterans enrolled at SJSU, and other local colleges. All were voluntary participants. Purposive sampling (Corbin and Strauss 2008) was employed to identify and recruit student Veterans who had served in OIF/OEF and were enrolled in a 4 year college program. Table 1 describes the demographics of all the participants who were recruited for the

project. Qualitative interviews conducted with the participants formed the primary unit of analysis.

The age of the participants was between 25 and 34. Two of the 13 participants were female Veterans. Two of the 13 participants were graduate students, while the other 11 were undergraduate students across Sophomore, Junior, and Senior years. 10 of the 13 participants were enrolled at SJSU at the time of interview, while two were at local private colleges, and one was at community college. Two of the participants were in the reserves after serving in active duty. Participants spoke about deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan and other places in the Middle East and Europe. All members of the group had completed at least one deployment as part of OIF and/or OEF. Years of active duty service in the military ranged from 3 years to 7 years, with the median being 4 years, and the mean being just under 5 years.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

Name	Age	Gender	Family Status	Years in the Military	Major	Year of College	College Category
Aidan	25	M	U	3	Web Design	Sophomore	Private
Blue ⁱⁱⁱ	30	M	U	3	Communication Studies	Senior	SJSU
Brian	30	M	U	3	Psychology	Senior	SJSU
Daniel	25	M	M	4	Political Science	Junior	Private
Edna	31	F	U	7	Engineering	Grad	SJSU
Greg	34	M	U	4	Justice Studies	Grad	SJSU
Jacob	29	M	M	4	Anthropology	Senior	SJSU
James	30	M	M	6	Industrial Technology	Junior	SJSU
Lily	25	F	M	7	Anthropology	Junior	SJSU
Matt	29	M	U	4	Anthropology	Senior	SJSU
Peter	25	M	D	5	Sociology	Sophomore	Community
Sam	31	M	M	5	Engineering	Junior	SJSU
Tim	34	M	D	5	Business	Senior	SJSU

Names are pseudonyms

Family Status (self-identification): U = Unmarried, M = Married, D = Divorced

Years in the Military: Shows years of being active duty only

Interviews were conducted on a mutually agreeable day, time and place. One interview was conducted on the Stanford campus in a meeting room in the participant's department building; one interview was conducted at a café in Sunnyvale, CA; and the other 11 interviews were all conducted on the SJSU campus either in group study rooms at the MLK library, or in a conference room in Clark Hall. The interviews lasted from between 1.5 to 3 hours and were conducted in either one or two sessions based on the participant's schedule and availability. The interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder with the oral and written consent of the project participants. The interviews were later transcribed and I used these transcripts to analyze the data I collected to formulate and support the recommendations that resulted from this project.

Though my role in the project was that of primary interviewer, I was assisted by a research team to conduct the interviews. This team included John Schlagheck, Adam Butterfield, and myself, who were all students in the Master's program at the Department of Applied Anthropology at San Jose State University. Maia Mandoli, an undergraduate student and Tamera Price, a graduate student, along with Adam Butterfield helped me to transcribe the interviews.

I submitted a draft copy of this report to Dr. Trisha Vinateri, staff psychologist at VITAL, and to Dr. Annabel Prins, principle investigator for VITAL. Analysis conversations with them became the iterative basis upon which I framed insights that would be actionable within the SJSU context.

Methodology

There is debate on the topic of how hermeneutic phenomenological research should be conducted. Proponents of the idiographic approach are more interested in understanding the individual over offering general insights, while others seek to illuminate essential and general structures of the phenomenon (Finlay 2009). This project attempted to find a middle ground between the two approaches by engaging two levels of analysis: by conducting interviews to get individual stories on how education is experienced as identity-forming; and second, by analyzing these stories to get at broader themes common to the phenomenon of claiming identity through education.

The theoretical framework of phenomenology was operationalized using the grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory is “the study of experience from the standpoint of those who live it” (Charmaz 2000), wherein the researcher inductively analyzes data to identify larger patterns pertaining to the phenomenon being studied. Thus the theory that is generated is “grounded” in collected data. Also known as local theory (Schensul et al 1999), or ethnography, this methodology seeks patterns in the data collected in the specific site of study.

The primary instrument for this project was the semi-structured interview for the in-depth exploration of the transition experiences of Veterans who have returned from OIF and OEF and are already enrolled at San Jose State University or at other colleges in the Bay Area. The interviews occurred with the knowledge that the data collected within this paradigm is representative of “what

people know and believe to be true about the world [which] is constructed - or made up- as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings.” (LeCompte and Schensul 1999). This exploration led to the uncovering of assertions about lived experiences that repeatedly surfaced during the interviews, and could be considered as being important to the project participants. The purpose of producing these themes is multifold. They provide a historical context in the student Veterans’ own words and build a foundation to understand the connections that they make between the different, but intertwined, domains, and lead to new ideas or questions that can emerge from careful analysis of these domains.

Interviews were conducted in person and were audio-taped after fully informing the participant of the objectives of the project and getting their consent to do so. The interviews were thereafter transcribed for analysis.

Project Limitations

This project faced a few limitations. Participants were recruited through emails and flyers, and participation was entirely voluntary. Participants who volunteered to be interviewed were eager to share their experiences and offer insights that they perceived would help make the transition to college easier for other student Veterans. They were a high-functioning group, motivated to finish their education, and resourceful in resolving barriers to that goal. I could not recruit any participants who had dropped out of college, or were thinking about

doing so, and was unable to capture the reasons that drive the decision to drop out. However, this is more a limitation of the scope of the project, than of the project itself. The focus for this project is on driving retention and understanding best practices that are in place, or could be put in place, that serve student Veterans as seen through the eyes of those that chose to continue their education.

My own non-military background was the other limitation. Participants spoke about not being able to connect with fellow students of non-military background on campus. This made me wonder if that meant that they were withholding information during the interview that they were uncomfortable sharing. I felt this acutely when they discussed PTSD and other health issues. These discussions were necessarily brief because I had neither sought nor been granted permission to probe further into these areas. The state of one's health impacts the transition experience, and not being able to probe deeper in that direction is another limitation of this project.

As an aspiring anthropologist, I always wondered if I would find the easy rapport with the project participants that is essential to collecting life stories. While I was concerned that being of a non-military background might pose a limitation to the project, there was another interesting question that cropped up during initial discussions with one of my committee members. Being darker-skinned and of South Asian origin, it was a concern whether just looking the way I do could trigger some memories from the participants' time in Iraq and

Afghanistan that would impede the interviews. While I am confident that my concerns were unfounded, and I managed to share a good rapport with all the participants, it cannot be ruled out that there might have been information that was withheld, either consciously or not, based on my ethnicity.

Project Audience

The project went through a metamorphosis from the time that it was conceived of in the Fall of 2010 to the time this report is being written up. The project was originally intended to inform the development of a new programmatic initiative called “The VA Bridge Project”, through a partnership between the Department of Anthropology at San Jose State University, and the Poly-trauma center at the Veterans Administration health care facility in Palo Alto, CA (VAPAHCS). The initiative was envisioned as benefiting returning OIF/OEF Veterans who were not enrolled in college, but were considering pursuing higher education. Through this initiative, introductory courses in Anthropology were to have been offered to Veterans referred through the Poly-trauma center at the VAPAHCS.

Veterans who would have been eligible to participate in the initiative would have been diagnosed as suffering from poly-trauma, which is defined as suffering from “injuries to multiple body parts and organs occurring as a result of blast-related wounds seen in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Traumatic brain injury (TBI) frequently occurs in poly-trauma in

combination with other disabling conditions, such as amputation, auditory and visual impairments, spinal cord injury (SCI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other medical conditions” (United States Department of Veterans Affairs 2010) The program was to be tailored to meet their unique needs and serve as an intermediary step before entering a formal program of study at university. This program was intended to provide a safe haven as student Veterans with poly-trauma tested their level of readiness for college.

Some of the original questions I had intended to answer as part of that project included exploring if there was a need for special programs such as the VA Bridge Initiative, and determining how classroom methods could be adapted to the different learning styles employed by the participants in the initiative. There was also to be an evaluation component to assess the effectiveness of the initiative and define the metrics that would be used to measure the success of the program.

However, due to personnel changes in the leadership team at the Polytrauma center at the VAPAHCS, and budget restrictions, this initiative was canceled after I had collected all my interview data for analysis. Rather than scrap the project and ignore the collected data, I was encouraged to seek a new audience that might be interested in the insights provided by my data. The data are still valuable as not only can they provide answers to improving the college experience for Veterans, but can also answer larger questions of how their identities are evolving as they make the transition from service member to

student. It is hoped that this project report will act as a resource for educators to enhance their understanding of the transition experiences that the Veterans undergo in the switch to college life from the military.

My primary audience on the SJSU campus is the VITAL (Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership) team that seeks to liaison between the VA Medical Center (VAMC) and higher education. VITAL strives to improve academic retention and success. The team at VITAL has a number of ex-military personnel who understand the unique factors that student Veterans face, and they have to capacity to provide resources to resolve these hurdles in the way of academic success. It is my hope that the themes uncovered in this project will add another dimension to the understanding of the hurdles that student Veterans face, and be informative and actionable as the VITAL team continues to enhance the services they offer.

Some of the areas that VITAL focuses on are peer mentor programs for student Veterans, individual and group counseling to address adjustment to civilian life, outreach and education on Veterans' issues for SJSU faculty and staff, working with the Accessible Education Center (AEC), formerly known as the Disability Resource Center, on campus to request academic accommodations, and connecting student Veterans to each other as well as to the broader community, which in turn aids the transition from military to civilian life. All of these themes, and some additional ones, were uncovered in the

interviews conducted during this project and a brief outline of these themes is presented later in this chapter.

An executive summary of this project was also submitted to the Veterans Advisory Committee (VAC), a panel of students, staff, faculty and administrators that advises the President of SJSU on issues relating to increasing retention and graduation rates for student Veterans by facilitating and promoting their academic and psychological success on the SJSU campus. The recommendations generated from my research provides direct input into how SJSU can support President Obama's "8 Keys to Veterans' Success", an initiative by the US Department of Education to identify ways that colleges and universities can support Veterans as they pursue their education and employment goals.

The project also carries relevance for the VAPAHCS, which is interested in having their patients make a successful transition to college. The findings could also benefit other similar initiatives around the country aiming to create Veteran-friendly programs and campuses. Finally, it is hoped that student Veterans themselves, and those with a scholarly interest in this and related topics will welcome an addition to the general literature on higher education.

Recurrent Ideas

I started this project with the intent to answer particular research questions which were: *What factors motivated the student Veteran to enlist in the military,*

and subsequently in seeking higher education upon discharge or separation? How do skills and attitudes developed during military tenure help or hamper academic life? In what ways do student Veterans perceive themselves as being similar to traditional or typical students, and in what ways do they perceive themselves to be dissimilar? What are the hurdles to academic success, and what are factors that have helped? What support networks are desired or utilized by student Veterans to aid in the transition from military to civilian life? These questions formed the lens through which the experiences of the participants were interpreted. This section provides a brief overview of the emerging themes which are further explored in the next few chapters wherein the reader will be introduced to the project participants, and will also read about their experiences in their own words through quotes supporting the ideas summarized here.

There is significant overlap between the factors that motivated the project participants to enlist in the military, and then enroll in higher education after their military tenure. Economic security, gainful employment, opportunity for professional advancement, and acquisition of job skills were some of the factors common to enlisting and enrolling. Honoring family tradition, patriotic duty, the opportunity to travel and a means to counter boredom and escape from present circumstances were some of the factors unique to enlisting. The promise of long term economic security, having more career choices, developing critical thinking skills, and investing in one's future were some factors unique to enrolling in higher education.

Exploring the skills and attitudes developed in the military and their effect on the transition to student life led to the emergence of the idea that one's identity is in flux and is created along multiple dimensions as determined by intrinsic and extrinsic factors acting upon the individual. Identity is context-driven, and military experiences like basic training, or boot camp as popularly known, deployments to war zones, longer-term separation from family, friends, and all things familiar, and military values such as prioritizing one's unit over oneself exert influence on the individual's perception of self. Similarly, identity formation continues when the Veteran goes to college. Being older than one's peers at college, feeling different because of one's life and combat zone experiences, returning to an academic environment after a long period, readjusting to family, friends, and all things that were familiar, and academic values such as intellectual curiosity, and independent thought take the place of the factors influencing identity formation in the military.

Moore (2012), in her examination of how Veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars understand, negotiate, and make sense of their combat experiences in the context of civilian college campuses, argues that college and the military are both teaching institutions, but they differ in "logics, traditions, and missions". She posits that the military's impact on identity reformation is so strong that it damages the Veteran's ability to adjust to the requirements of university culture.

The participants in this study frequently mentioned certain skills and personality traits as having been gained during military tenure. These included self-confidence, discipline, focus, self-reliance, leadership qualities, resourcefulness and adaptability. These were leveraged in successful campus strategies such as being on time, building rapport with the instructor, and staying on task to finishing assignments in the allotted time. The military also inculcates clear expectations about command structure and hierarchy. However, these skills and learnings gained from the military were at odds with campus life and often emerged as the student veteran's intolerance towards other students exhibiting tardiness, or disrespect towards faculty and staff and created hindrances to acculturating to an academic environment and adjusting to a younger peer group on campus.

Student Veterans remarked on the things SJSU has done to make the campus more welcoming. The help provided by the Registrar's Office in sorting through paperwork to claim educational benefits, and the priority registration offered to student Veterans were both lauded. At the same time, they identified gaps in easing the transition; the paucity of opportunities to network with other student Veterans was brought up several times, as well as the unmet need regarding training faculty and staff to be more aware of Veterans' issues in the classroom. Lack of understanding of PTSD and other war-related injuries that are not physically apparent, dissatisfaction with the AES, and unhappiness over the length of time it takes to see an academic counselor trained in Veterans' issues

were all cited as areas where SJSU can improve the college experience for this demographic. VITAL has since worked tirelessly to successfully address some of these needs. However, as described in the recommendations chapter, the backing of the University, both in terms of personnel and policy, is essential to completely bridging the gaps.

Student Veterans spent considerable time discussing feelings of isolation on campus. They spoke about how they missed the camaraderie of their military unit, and the “culture shock” felt as part of the transition to civilian life. Coming from a culture where every recruit is assigned a “battle buddy”: a fellow soldier with whom one is mutually responsible for keeping on schedule, and out of danger (Moore 2012), to the culture on a college campus which expects students to make decisions on their individual educational trajectories enhanced this feeling of being bereft of the camaraderie and support that the military provided. Opportunities to network with other student Veterans, engaging friends and family members in the journey through higher education, and encouragement by faculty and staff in the form of mentorship programs were identified as being critical to providing a supportive environment on campus. This last point regarding mentorship programs aligns with one of VITAL’s main goals. Research has shown that an interested mentor who provides timely encouragement and motivation positively influences GPAs (Campbell and Campbell 2007), performance at higher levels, and the overall satisfaction with the college

experience leading to higher graduation rates (Kuh 2007). These findings are explored further in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Success, the Military, and Higher Education

This chapter, and the next two, discuss the themes that emerged from the personal stories and transition experiences as described by the project participants. The major themes and subthemes that emerged from this project are listed in Table 2. Through these themes, I highlight student-recommended solutions to address unmet needs as perceived by the project participants. These solutions are outlined in the final chapter which makes recommendations on how the college experience at SJSU can be made even richer for this population. It is the hope of the author that by bringing these recommendations under consideration, not only will this population be better served, but SJSU will further be seen as an institution that strives for equality and excellence in meeting the needs of the diverse groups of students that walk through its halls.

The first section of this chapter examines the reasons for wanting to enlist as voiced by the project participants. I find that many of the reasons overlap significantly with the factors that subsequently led them to enroll in college after their military tenure. An examination of the motivators gives a clearer picture of the participant's expectations of themselves, and of the college experience that they envision will help them achieve their goals and dreams.

The second section discusses how the participants embraced the military identity. It looks at the transformation from civilian to service member through activities, relationships, artifacts, and experiences- a transformation wherein learning was through engagement in practice, or on-the-job training.

Table 2: List of Themes and Subthemes among 13 OIF/OEF Veterans

Success, the Military, and Higher Education

- Motivators behind enlisting in the military and enrolling in college
- Multiple Dimensions of Identity: civilian to service member to student

The Veteran on Campus, and in the Classroom

- Describing the transition
- Experiencing the transition
- Adapting to higher education

Support Networks

- Faculty and Staff
 - Peers on campus
 - Family and friends
-

Understanding this transformation is vital to effectively actuate the reverse transition from service member to student. For example: in higher education, especially in the current reality of budget cuts and resource stress, the dominant model is that of directive pedagogy, wherein the instructor is the disburser of knowledge, and the students are the consumers of it. For Veterans who are accustomed to learning on the job, it takes some getting used to this shift in how knowledge transfer is expected to occur in the classroom. Understanding the transformation of civilian to service member to student gives insight into the tools and skills that this population has honed which can be leveraged to further enrich their classroom experience and make reintegration smoother.

Occupational and Institutional Motivators

Charles Moskos (1977) divides motivators for joining any organization into the “occupational” or extrinsic values that are material-driven, and the “institutional” or intrinsic values that belong to, and are commonly associated with the particular organization. The “occupational” motivators usually prioritize self-interest over the interest of the employing organization. In the case of the military, the “occupational” motivators are material factors such as gainful employment, acquisition of technical training, professional self-improvement, and educational benefits. However, unlike civilian employees, where it is the norm to be paid based on professional expertise, compensation to military personnel is a function of rank, seniority, and need (Moskos 1977). The educational and monetary benefits were a primary motivator for some participants to choose the military.

“Oh, I was 18. And when you’re 18, you don’t really know what you’re getting into. I joined for the service aspect. I liked the job requirement or job skills. You know, West Point pays for all your education. And 5 years in the military service, the Army, it seemed like a dynamic job at the time.” - Edna

“The recruiters were offering me a job and I was racking up the bills and I was still living with my parents and I think that kind of offered me a way out.” - James

The intrinsic motivators are seen as a contrast to the occupational motivators, and are values that differentiate the military life from civilian life.

These values transcend individual self-interest in favor of a presumed higher good (Moskos 1977). Continuing a family tradition, patriotic duty and service to country, opportunity to travel, and the possibility of escaping from current circumstances are the institutional factors that motivated the project participants to enlist in the military. Aidan spoke, partly in jest, but partly seriously, about how he had little choice in the matter, and military service was pre-determined for the male members of his family.

“It was a bit of a family tradition. Everyone in my family is in the military, especially the males, and basically you don't have a choice. I mean you do, you have a choice of saying no and face being shunned by your family and not having your portrait on the hallway wall. So that's a big motivator for us. All the males in our family go into the military.” - Aidan

Another participant, Blue, presented the combination of patriotic duty and family tradition, both intrinsic factors, as well as the material factor of being able to pay for college, as motivation to enlist

“My family tradition, plus 9-11, post 9-11. After the twin towers got struck, I was like, I gotta do my patriotic duty. Also I had a family tradition and then thirdly I was like, well, how am I going to pay for college? So that was something I couldn't always rely on my parents for.” - Blue

Blue talked about the opportunity to travel that he took advantage of and the experiences that he might not have had but for the military; and Sam touched upon the prestige and honor of being a service member.

“I never would have saw [sic] the White House. You know, I would never have experienced other ethnic cultures, and I would never have experienced an 18 hour flight. Yeah, I would never have experienced any of those things.” - Blue

“The challenge, the physical challenge and then the prestige that goes along with it and the opportunity to travel.” - Sam

Daniel, Jacob, and Greg all gave accounts of enlisting in the military to escape undesirable circumstances. Daniel had a challenging youth, but was determined in finding a way to improve his situation. Jacob and Greg both discovered that they were unhappy in their career choices, and the military offered a more attractive alternative that would provide them some tangible direction in life.

“I guess I always wanted to be a Marine. I wanted to join because I wanted to be a Marine, not because of the....I didn't even think about the incentives far as the GI bill. To be honest, I didn't even realize how great the benefits would be until afterwards. So it's a nice perk. Growing up, I had unstable family dynamics. My parents were arrested, I was surrounded by a lot of drugs and alcohol, in different custodianships, if that's even a word- legal guardianships? I didn't do well. I think that actually transferred into me being self-

actuating, but that's a completely different story. When I joined the Marine Corps, I passed all the reconnaissance tests. To get to that level, you have to be motivated to get to the goals that you want to get to." - Daniel

"Honestly, what motivated me to join the military initially was just on a whim. I was having difficulty in school. I am a fairly intelligent person. So I was able to sail through high school without really having to try. I found out to my disappointment that that didn't work in college. I had no real work experience to go off of. My college life wasn't going anywhere, so I figured (the military) would be a good direction." - Jacob

"I paid my way through my associate's degree at junior college. I was working a crappy, dead-end retail job and was tired of it. And I figured I might as well enlist while I still can. I was older when I enlisted. That's how I got into joining the army. It was something I wanted to do for a long time. I just finally took the initiative and enlisted." - Greg

Table 3 lists the occupational and institutional motivators described by the project participants as being the reasons they enlisted in the military, followed by those they felt prompted them to enroll at college. This project uncovers that many of the motivators to enlisting in the military overlap with the motivation to enroll in college. For occupational motivators, this comes as no surprise since the extrinsic values are very much what most job seekers look for in any organization, whether military or civilian. The intrinsic or occupational motivators

were different, highlighting that the culture of the military differs substantially from that of college.

However, the essential difference is in the perception of the length of time that the benefits from both occupational as well as institutional motives stretch over. While participants looked to the military to provide short-term benefits, going through college was seen as a way to cement benefits more for the long-term. Participants expressed thoughts around a college education being the vehicle to have choice and control over one’s professional life, to buy a house, to provide a better environment in which to raise a family, and to enjoy life.

Table 3: Occupational and Institutional Motivators

Enlisting in the Military	Enrolling at College
Occupational Motivators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of job skills • Gainful employment • Educational benefits Institutional Motivators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family tradition • Patriotic duty • Opportunity to travel • Means of escape from current economic and social conditions • Seeking a goal to counter boredom 	Occupational Motivators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of a college degree • Gainful employment • Ability to advance professionally Institutional Motivators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term economic security • More options in career choices • Developing critical thinking skills • Expanding one’s worldview • Investing in one’s future

The distinction made between military service and the promise of college was that the former was a job, while the latter was the launch pad to a career. A college degree provides more choices for professional development. In contrast to the military, which pays based on seniority and rank, a college education allows one to demand compensation commensurate with individual expertise and knowledge.

“I want to have a house when I am 30 and the friends I make now and the education I put myself through now is going to get me there. That’s the way I look at it.” - Blue

Jacob felt that by making a decision to pursue a degree in Anthropology, he was “taking steps in the right direction” towards achieving the personal goals he had set for himself.

“I own a small condo right now and I am hoping to upgrade to an actual house with a yard eventually. A good place for my sons to grow up.” - Jacob

Peter acknowledged that the military had helped him meet a lot of his personal goals, but that he still looked to completing college and getting a degree to ensure a more permanent state of emotional well-being.

“The biggest personal goal for me though is eventually I want to have my own family and now, I guess from there enjoy life.” - Peter

Research shows that institutionally-motivated service members are less likely to continue in the military past their contractual obligations (Griffith 2007).

For this population, college holds the promise of providing more options when deciding upon a career path. This came through when participants were asked what advice they had for their fellow Veterans who might be weighing the benefits of enrolling at college. One response indicated that the job skills learned in the military were limited in scope.

“You come out of the military. Ok, you know how to turn wrenches, how would you like to learn how to turn more wrenches?! At least be learning something. Don't just pass (a college education) up, it's too good to give up.” - Aidan

While Jacob went further in stating that the mind was “under developed” during military service.

Jacob: “Where you had to exercise your body in the military, you now have to exercise your mind, which for most has been rather underdeveloped while in the service. Infantry during wartime have a very clear job, they go out on the front line and shoot people. During peace-time, do you know what they do?”...

Me: “No.”

Jacob: “Neither do they! They do a lot of tactical training, making sure they know what to do as an individual, buddy, as a squad, as a platoon, as a company. But you can go over that only so many times before it's drilled into everybody's heads and its muscle memory now. At the end of the day, you let them go and tell them, same thing tomorrow. The biggest difficulty for infantry is not the

grasping of actual tactics- It's not getting a DUI when you're off-duty."

College also holds the promise of going beyond meeting the material needs of financial security. It presents the possibility of having a voice in demanding appropriate compensation as well as having the power to influence work conditions. Greg, Brian, Daniel, Jacob, and Matt said that they were looking to further their education through a post-graduate program, either a Master's or a Ph.D. after completing their current degree. They felt that an advanced degree was the path to professional satisfaction.

"Ultimately I would like to teach at the college level, as well as do writing and research professionally." - Greg

"But I plan to go back to school and get my graduate degree in Public Policy, and Law or Masters in Business/Masters in Public policy-one of those dual offered degree. From there, I'd probably like to go work in Washington somewhere, maybe at a think-tank or something along those lines." - Daniel

Along with professional satisfaction, another intangible benefit of higher education is the chance to expand one's worldview. Matt touched upon college as broadening one's mind and equipping one to analytically be able to separate out the propaganda fed in the military from the truth.

"I wasn't the typical soldier following directions. I was the type of soldier always asking questions, and I had a lot of questions. Why are we going to this war? Why are there poor people by the side of

the road? Why're we bombing? Why aren't we going after Bin Laden when we have reports that he's in Pakistan? It's like I have so many questions and none of them are getting answered or I just haven't found the answers. Until I started coming to school and being educated, I was able to figure out how propaganda works, how history has repeated itself and how it's playing out today." - Matt

Lily spoke about education being a "gift to yourself", in that it opened up many opportunities to do something with one's life.

"Whatever you're studying is going to open your mind much more. Just to experience other things, other than what you know now. It just takes you, it just opens so many doors, so many opportunities and it colors a better picture for anyone who wants to do something with their lives. It's great to go back to school, not only socially, but academically. Just expanding your knowledge and your education is a gift to yourself." - Lily

These motivators shed light on how the project participants define success. Success includes financial security - in terms of being able to buy a house, and providing for a family; professional satisfaction - the ability to have options in making career decisions; emotional well-being- being able to enjoy life, developing the maturity to think critically, and expanding one's own worldview in the process of self-fulfillment. It is obvious that these parameters of success as identified by these student Veterans are not that different from those of more traditional students. However, the skills and behaviors that student Veterans

have developed over the course of their military careers can provide additional insight into how programs and services can be tailored to maximize the chances of providing a meaningful college experience and successful completion of their educational journey at SJSU.

Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Despite the variety of reasons that prompted enlistment, the project participants share the common theme of loss of community. This loss is first felt during the transition from civilian to soldier. They have left the places and communities that they grew up in and moved to unfamiliar locations in their journey to becoming service members. They have been socialized into the military culture by internalizing institutional values, norms, and role expectations (Caforio 2003, Lande 2007). They have been through a period of adjustment in their new environments, some of which have been exceedingly hostile given that they have all been deployed to war zones in Iraq and Afghanistan. Carne equates this loss of community to a loss of one's identity, and the replacement of that loss with a new identity as they integrate with the military (2011).

While she acknowledges that it is difficult to generalize about any population, she suggests that the reverse transition from service to civilian life is also fraught with cultural adjustment as this population learns to acculturate to university life and adjust to not only their families and friends, but also to other students, faculty and staff on campus. Returning student Veterans are catapulted

into the new culture of college. They bring previous experiences that are likely unrecognizable to their new peers on campus and are expected to interact, adapt and integrate into this new environment

On campus then, they undergo a second instance of a loss of identity. The adjustment to college requires instilling self-discipline with fewer external enforcers of it, adapting to varied teaching styles of instructors, accepting a wider expression of academic freedom including personal views and opinions, and interacting with other students whom they may share very little in common with and may see as temporary actors within their personal narratives.

Building on Carne's assessment, the perspective this project aligns with is that these project participants claim multiple dimensions of identity, with each dimension influencing one's identity construction based on the context at any given instance. Jones and McEwen's model for multiple dimensions of identity (2000) posits that an individual's identity can be represented by intersecting circles with each circle signaling dimensions of identity either claimed by individuals themselves, or ascribed to them by external observers. These circles revolve around a core sense of self- the "inner identity," which in contrast to the outer circles, is the way the individuals see themselves. Figure 1 illustrates the concept of this model as it applies to the project participants. Age, gender, the branch they served in, where they are in their academic career- whether undergraduate or graduate- are all dimensions along which the project participants create identity within any given context. Moreover, their experiences

in the military, the majority of which might be completely alien to their civilian peers and people in their personal networks are a large influence on shaping their opinion of themselves, and the way in which they interpret the world around them.

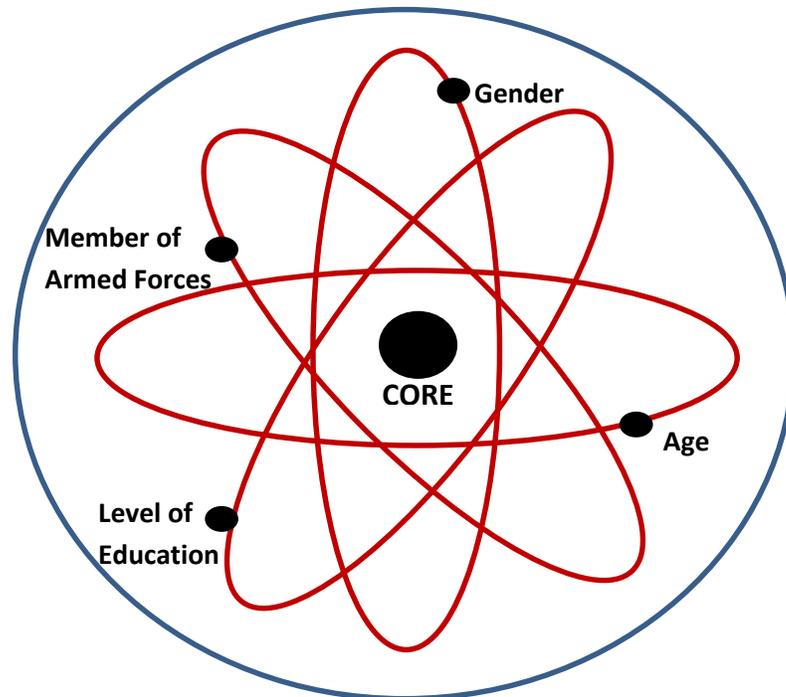


Figure 1: Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

The overlap between the different dimensions depicts the possibility of living comfortably with multiple identities (Jones and McEwen 2000). These multiple identities can even be interconnected along the different dimensions. At the center of the model is the core. This core represents the inherent personal characteristics and attributes of an individual which the participants claimed existed even before they enlisted. Self-actualization, motivation, and attitude were some of the attributes the participants spoke about as pre-dating their

tenure in the military. These core attributes and characteristics remain unchanged, even as new ones are added, while different dimensions of identity are influenced by one's experiences and shifting contexts. This inner core can be thought of as the "personality" that Jacob spoke about.

"My personality has not changed a lot since I was in high school. The few changes that have happened, I directly attribute to my military training." - Jacob

"When I joined the Marine Corps, I passed all the reconnaissance tests. To get to that level, you have to be motivated to get to the goals that you want to get to." - Daniel

The military is a unique organization in that it is not a workplace that merely defines what one does, but also defines who one is. This underscores the need to understand the influence of having served in the military as part of a collective group on the attitudes and behaviors of student Veterans, while carefully acknowledging that no two individuals, even with shared experiences of a warzone, are identical.

This identity formation begins with basic training, or as is better known colloquially - boot camp.

"...before you go into the military, you have to go through a certain procedure - boot camp. So when you go through boot camp, a regular person will never know what the heck that is, until once you get through it, you are accepted into the organization." - Blue

Peter speaks about how boot camp is deliberately structured to transform one's identity into that of a service member.

"...understand why boot camp exists, predominantly, ok? Because there's guys that even have PTSD from boot camp you know? What it's used, when you look at it, that culture, what you're doing is you're shocking somebody, you know, like culture shock? Ok, so that's what boot camp is about. But at the same time it breaks us down mentally, it builds us up physically and it restructures exactly what we're supposed to be; which is just action with less thought but at the same time obedience to orders." - Peter

Completing basic training is a rite of passage that confirms one's membership in the military. It tests one's dedication and determination in becoming a service member. Several of the project participants described basic training as being very difficult, and driving them nearly to quitting the military early in their careers.

"I actually tried to quit when I was in basic training. My first sergeant at the time gave me a talking to. His door was closed, but I have no doubt that everyone in the building heard him yelling. He called me every name in the book, he insulted my intelligence, he insulted my heritage, he insulted my looks, everything. All because I had only been at it a month and wanted to quit. After he finished yelling, he opened the door and told me if I really had low enough self-esteem and I thought I was worthless, I could go ahead and leave. So I stayed." - Jacob

However, interestingly, successfully completing basic training gave the project participants a confidence boost unlike any other. This confidence was expressed

in terms of college being less of a formidable challenge after having survived basic training.

“If anybody can go through college, I can go through college. Just like when I went through basic training, there were times when I thought I should quit. But when I thought about, a lot of people have been through basic training, it’s not that hard. Its mind over matter, of you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter. That’s the attitude I tend to have. Just suck it up and deal with it and you’ll get through eventually.” - Greg

Lily summed it up as follows:

“A lot of people say that, boot camp after boot camp- ‘Oh man, I would do that all over again.’ Boot camp is the place to find yourself. The experience after that kind of refines you. I don’t think that anyone would not want to go through that again. I really can’t imagine anyone saying, ‘Hell, no, I wouldn’t, I don’t want to go back’.” - Lily

Much like basic training, college is not easy, and needs a lot of hard work and dedication. A successful college education is also a way to self-realization. A good higher education experience is analogous to refining oneself. If successful and fulfilling, it is an experience that no one should imagine *not* wanting to go through again.

Military structures are often unique and quite unlike civilian structures. Especially for this population, deployments to war zones required that they live in close quarters with other members of their unit, and be separated from family,

friends, and other personal social networks for long periods. Additionally, a job in the military is understood to be a commitment that extends well beyond the traditional 9-to-5 workplace; especially when deployed to a war zone, it exists twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Participants spoke about the military as a lifestyle. Jacob contrasted the amount of time one is “on the job” in the military with how little time he spends on campus.

“Being in the military was your lifestyle. You got up before dawn and you usually got back after dark. More than half your day was spent there. For me, I organize my classes so I miss rush hour traffic. I’m usually only in school maybe 4 hours at a time. I drive in, get here about 9, in class until 1 in the afternoon, then go home.” - Jacob

Some spoke about how the military “controls” one’s life.

“You come from a very structured way of living [in the military] where somebody tells you when to eat, when to sleep, when to shower, when to shave, when to go to the bathroom, where you’re going to be, how long you’re going to be there for. Your entire life is completely controlled.” - Greg

Military culture dictates that individualism be deprioritized in favor of the unit. This clear chain of command is necessary in an organization, especially during wartime, where people’s lives depend on responding predictably, following orders, and putting the unit’s interests ahead of one’s own (Anderson n.d.).

Insubordination is never tolerated, and questioning authority can have unpleasant consequences.

“[I learned not to question authority because] If you question one of their orders, they would look at you funny and say, alright- start pushing. Then you get down on the ground, start doing your push-ups, and they’d go on with their lecture, and after 2-3 minutes, they say, alright, get up and in line.(I learned not to question authority) through getting that a couple of times, also watching a couple of people who didn’t get the message quite so quickly, getting dropped for push-ups a lot more than I did.” - Jacob

While one cannot stereotype Veterans, embracing the military identity instills traits shared by successful students, such as motivation, discipline, attention to detail, personal responsibility among others. All of these traits instilled in service members can and should be leveraged in the classroom. These traits can be seen as being added, if initially absent, to the inner core around which contextual identity is built. A classroom experience that aligns with these traits is likely to be viewed as more beneficial to learning.

“(The military) instilled the drive in me to do as well as I can, instilled the discipline. And, did I say motivation, it’s motivation, discipline, what else, oh detail-oriented. All those factors really helped when I was in the military. And it does help now shaping the way I think about things, the way I do things.” - Matt

Participants talked about responsibility- for oneself, as well as for others. Many of their behaviors were learned and served them well during their career in the military.

“These things that people do in combat and overseas, and the level of responsibility you have at 19 years old or 20 years old is extremely unparalleled anywhere in the civilian world, without a doubt.” - Daniel

Participants spoke about how they began to see the tasks they had to complete as a duty.

“(because of)] my training in the military, it is pretty much a duty to get (the college work) done.” - Blue

Identity is not a static concept. It develops as one intersects with other members of society, and as one learns about oneself through these interactions. The Veteran identity is not a monolithic entity, and neither is that of the student Veteran. Each returning service member that I interviewed has his or her own unique story and set of experiences during their military service. What they have in common is that they are all returning to their country, their families, and civilian lives.

In much the same way as there are rites of passage in transitioning from civilian to service member, there are rituals that mark the transition from service member to student. Arnold van Gennep, a prominent social theorist and anthropologist of the early twentieth century studied “rites de passage” in tribal

societies. Rites of passage were rituals designed to move individuals from one developmental stage into another (Tierney 1992). One of the main purposes of these institutionalized rituals was to confer a sense of belonging to maintain order within the culture and ensure its continued survival.

In the same way, college can be thought of as a vehicle to integrate students into society by putting them through institutionalized rituals of higher education. Rites of passage have three phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation, each with its own specialized ceremonies and rituals (Van Gennep 1960). In the first phase, the individual has to detach from their current place and status and move to a new place and status. This detachment is accompanied by symbolic actions and rituals. For the civilian transitioning into a service member this phase is marked by dissociating with one's family and friends and moving to living quarters on a military base, altering one's physical appearance by cutting one's hair, and wearing a uniform. For a traditional student, separation might occur by moving from home into a college dorm. For the participants in this study, the transition was characterized by separating from the military and moving out of a military base into civilian housing. Some of them already had families of their own and were required to provide housing for their dependents. Some moved back in with their parents and siblings.

The second phase is the period between states, a time of adjustment to one's new environment. While boot camp fulfills the function of this phase in the military, for college students, it is a time of testing one's coping mechanisms to

face the stressful demands of higher education. Students are tested on their discipline to show up on time to attend class, complete assignments and projects on schedule, and satisfactorily prepare for written tests and oral presentations. Additionally, student Veterans in this study were simultaneously also learning to navigate the daily demands of civilian adulthood: cooking, paying rent, finding jobs, and caring for family members.

This phase is also a time of exploring and establishing new relationships on campus, with faculty and other students. For student Veterans, this includes seeking out other Veterans on campus that they identify with through shared experiences in an attempt to replace the camaraderie felt with colleagues during their time in military service. Many students withdraw at this stage if they are unsuccessful in social and academic integration into college (Tinto 1987, Freeman et al 2007).

The final stage is incorporation. This is when students feel like they have successfully integrated into college life through academic performance as well as participation in extracurricular activities through social clubs, fraternities or sororities. Transition can be considered complete when a student successfully graduates from the institution of higher learning. The arc of student identity culminates in the identity of a college graduate.

If self-identity is through to be integrating experiences into an evolving “story of the self” (Giddens 1991), then these transactions on campus with peers,

with educators, with SJSU staff, will be appended to the Veterans' narratives as they reinforce their self-identity as a civilian and student.

The process of learning occurs through two channels: one is the formal, institutionalized component of transmitting concepts within a particular discipline; the other is transmitting learning as experiential and embodied through the experience of interacting with others in a communal activity. The implications of Jones and McEwen's model are relevant to the second component. Educators need to be aware of how the process of transmitting learning leads to a change in context, and impacts multiple dimensions of identity development in the student Veterans. All of the experiences, the skills, the training that impinged upon identity formation within the military, are also at play in the process of renegotiating identity on the campus, and in the classroom. A large part of this renegotiation is in the expectations one places on oneself as a student, and the expectations from the college and the campus that they provide a supportive environment in which one can freely pursue one's dreams and goals. The next chapter discusses how this renegotiation occurs on campus, and in the classroom.

Chapter 3: The Veteran on Campus, and in the Classroom

From the interview data, it is apparent that student Veterans who participated in this project have common challenges as they navigate through college. Some of these challenges pertain broadly to the campus, and others are more specific to the classroom. After returning from a warzone, not only do these participants face challenges as they reintegrate back with their families, friends, and communities, but they also have to contend with interacting with other students, faculty, and staff as they engage in campus life. The trauma of war, physical and psychological injuries, and combat related stress all play a part in elevating these challenges to a higher magnitude.

Goodman et al. (2006, p. 33) defined a transition as “any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles”. This definition emphasizes the role of perception in transitions; a transition exists only if so defined by the person experiencing it. Individuals recognize themselves to be in transition if they attach significant meaning to the changes occurring in their lives.

Transitions are not unique to this student population. We all undergo changes numerous times through our lifetime. However the recommendations that this project makes aim to make the adjustment from service member to civilian easier. The argument that student Veterans claim multiple identities indicates that there is not a linear model that can provide a fixed set of solutions. Instead, a framework that identifies elements that could be combined to create

solutions tailored to these multiple identities is needed. For the participants in this project, returning from war zones is perceived as a significant event that changes their lives fundamentally. Coupled with being in an academic environment, trying to negotiate campus life, adjusting to their peers in college, and re-establishing social networks that may have been put on hiatus during their military tenure are all events that are associated with this transition from military to civilian life. While these specific events act as triggers that indicate transition has begun, the transition itself is a lengthy process with the time needed to complete the transition varying with the person and the situations that support or hamper the transition.

As evidenced in the preceding chapter, education is the pathway to gaining agency and symbolic capital as productive individuals and social agents. At the national level, higher education is seen as the institution that increases the country's global competitiveness. Spanard (1990), in her study, suggested that adult students who complete their degrees perceive higher personal satisfaction and regard career fulfillment as a benefit of having gone to college.

Transition occurs in phases, which Goodman et al. (2006, pp. 184) termed as "moving in", "moving through", and "moving out". Academic success can be measured in terms of how many student Veterans moving into SJSU are able to smoothly move through, and eventually move out, well-equipped to pursue their goals beyond higher education, in a reasonable amount of time. As voiced by Daniel, who has already "moved in" by enrolling in college, his concept of

“moving through” includes going to graduate school next, and finally “moving out” by securing a job in his desired location and field of study.

“I plan to go back to school and get my graduate degree in Public Policy, From there, I’d probably like to go work in Washington somewhere, maybe at a think-tank or something along those lines.”

- Daniel

Goodman et al. (2006) identified four major sets of factors that influence an individual’s capacity to cope with the challenges accompanying transition: Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies, collectively known as the 4 S framework. The ease of the transition depends on the individual’s resources in, and control over, each of these four areas.

The first part of this chapter applies this 4 S framework to the project participants. It illustrates each of the four areas on the framework using quotations pulled from the interview data. This process of applying the framework to the project participants then informs the second part of this chapter which explores how the skills, the tools, and the behaviors learned as part of embracing the military translate to reclaiming civilian identity. The second part also explores what SJSU is already doing as an institution towards being a welcoming place for Veterans. It highlights classroom practices that the project participants observed as being helpful and benefiting their transition into higher education. It continues into areas where the project participants felt that their needs were unmet. These unmet needs cover the range from how SJSU could devise better policies and

procedures applicable campus-wide, to how instructors could make the classroom experience richer and more accessible, thereby increasing the chances of successfully completing the project program.

Returning Veterans in the process of reintegration embody cultural values that straddle both their military as well as their civilian identities. By understanding this population, and its talents, instructors can leverage those into better engagement with student Veterans in the classroom.

Applying the 4 S Framework

The main application of Goodman and Schlossberg's transition theory is to adult learners and their return to higher education. Table 4 summarizes the 4 S framework, which can be effectively applied to this student population to understand the nature of the transition from military to school.

Table 4: Goodman and Schlossberg's Transitional Model

Transitions

- Events or non-events resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, or roles

The Transition Process

- Moving in, moving through, moving out

Coping with Transitions

- Influenced by resources in regard to four areas
 - **Situation:** *Triggers* precipitating transition, *Timing* of the transition, *Control* over the changes accompanying the transition,

Role Change, Duration of the transition, *Previous Experience* with a similar transition, *Concurrent Stress* interfering with the transition, *Assessment* regarding who or what is responsible for the transition and whether it is seen as a positive or negative change

- **Self:** *Personal and Demographic Characteristics* (socio-economic status, gender, age, state of health, ethnicity), *Psychological Resources* (outlook, commitment, values)
 - **Support:** *Support networks* in the form of family, friends, institutional support
 - **Strategies:** *Coping Mechanisms* (employed by the individual, provided by the institution)
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Situation - *Describing* the transition from the military to student life

Goodman and Schlossberg draw a distinction between anticipated transitions and unanticipated transitions. Military recruits with an intention of claiming educational benefits anticipate a fixed duration of deployment and length of service, after which begins the transition to student life. However, unanticipated transitions that come with an earlier-than-expected date of return post injury in the war zone carry greater difficulty of a perceived lack of control over one's future. Thus, even though the overall situation is the same, there can exist nuanced differences in the particular circumstances that led to the Veterans' transition to student life. The factors useful in understanding how student

Veterans describe the academic and social environment that they find themselves transitioning into, on campus are:

Trigger: This factor examines what precipitated the transition. The relevant trigger for the purposes of this project is that Veterans are returning from war, and are aspiring to start the reintegration process through higher education. They choose higher education as a pathway to securing their economic, professional, and personal goals for their future. They view the military as having given them some limited skills which they want to build upon.

“You come out of the military, ok you know how to turn wrenches, how would you like to learn how to turn more wrenches?! At least be learning something. Don't just pass [a college education] up, it's too good to give up.” - Aidan

“I got back in 2003 from deployment. It took me a year to find a decent job, and then I decided to go to school, cuz otherwise I wasn't going to make enough money to support a family.” - Tim

Timing: This factor relates to *when* a transition occurs. The individual experiencing the transition may, or may not think of it as happening during a good time. None of the project participants discussed whether the timing of enrolling in higher education affected their college experience. However, having taken a detour through a military career before higher education, they were older than their peers on campus. Many of them spoke about how being older than

cohort gave them a different perspective on academic life. This was alternately viewed as something positive, in that they were more mature and better equipped to deal with the demands of higher education, as well as a negative, in that they felt different from their peers and were sometimes unable to relate to the latter, leading to feelings of isolation. Someone who enrolls at SJSU right after high school is less likely to have a spouse and children than a non-traditional older student like the project participants. Aidan talked about the challenges of arranging for a time to meet with other students in order to complete group assignments.

“The big problem is that, once again it has to be the age gap. Older people have priorities, they have families and stuff to take care of, they have work, they can't always show up on the weekend or on this particular day, and scheduling everyone is always a major issue.” - Aidan

Edna talked about how being older imposed physical limitations on her, but she also acknowledged that it brought the maturity to recognize those limitations and devise a solution to succeed at school.

“I know that I am older and I can't recover from an all-nighter. I can't have 10 red bulls and be ok like the other guys can do it. The other guys haven't learnt their limitations and they end up falling flat. You're not going to be able to stay up two nights in a row working on a 20 page paper, that's not going to happen. I know my limitations and I know what I need to do to be successful.” - Edna

Control: Eight of the 13 participants talked about how the educational benefits - the GI Bill, was a motivating factor in enlisting. Even though the other five weren't influenced by this benefit when deciding to enlist, all 13 participants spoke about these benefits as being invaluable in enabling their college education. The Post 9/11 GI bill provides up to 36 months of education benefits. Veterans may also be eligible for payments for housing, books and supplies. These benefits are seen as pivotal to giving them some control over their decision to go to college.

Role Change: As seen in chapter 2, the model of multiple dimensions of identity applied to my project participants makes it evident that transitioning from the military to the civilian life requires a role change. Tim spoke about how he draws from his military experience in navigating this change in role in a classroom setting. During group assignments, he assesses the situation before either taking on the responsibility of being the leader, or letting someone else assume that role if they want to. This is different from the hierarchical structure of the military where orders are passed down from higher ranks to lower ranks.

“(College is a) little bit different in like group projects and stuff like that. In the military...if you had a higher rank, and asked people to do something, they would do it. (In college,) sometimes it takes a little while to feel things out. Usually I end up being a leader, or assisting if someone else wants to be the leader then I'll let them and I'll help them. It's unstructured. I just have to feel things out and see exactly where I fit in and maximize that role.” - Tim

Duration: Traditional college programs span four years. Increasingly, public universities are held to a six year graduation rate. Some of the participants had transferred from community college into SJSU, while others were eager to continue their education at graduate school. They were all aware of the duration of completing a college degree before committing to embarking on the journey.

Previous experience with a similar transition: All the project participants had some years of academic training before military tenure. The nature of this academic training spanned from high school, to community college, to a degree program. Not surprisingly, for some participants, their previous experience with formal education was what had driven them to enlist in the military in the first place.

“After that first horrible semester where I thought college was difficult, I went into the military and I thought that the military wasn’t so bad.” - Jacob

However, their experiences in college post-deployment were a marked contrast to their previous experiences.

“Before the military, I was really a lax student. I was never an over-achiever. Never made straight A’s. I stopped making straight A’s in fifth grade. When I got to college and high school, I wasn’t driven. I had no goals. I had no plan. I just didn’t have any discipline.” - Lily

Concurrent stress: Just like traditional students, student Veterans may be juggling multiple priorities. Lily continued discussing her situation in terms of

other responsibilities that were vying for her time. Fortunately for her, this concurrent stress helped her focus better in the classroom.

“Now, I am still not a straight A student. I probably would be, but I have a baby. But it’s ok. I just think that I am more focused, and I pay attention in class and I sit in the front. Which is a big change, because I used to sit in the back.” - Lily

War related injuries, both psychological as well as physical, are obviously a significant and weighty concurrent stress that some of the project participants, and this population at large, are dealing with as they move through college. College is not easy, and invites its own set of stressors brought about by deadlines, grades, and rigorous academic expectations.

“...dealing with my own issues of PTSD and stuff like that. I have problems with memory, so sometimes it’s hard for me to retain certain knowledge of what I’ve learnt in school. I’ve always been horrible at taking exams and tests, so that’s been a setback as well. Then also, when school is really stressful, for me, it will trigger war memories which equates to less sleep and stuff like that. It’s been very challenging in that respect.” - Greg

Personal relationships can also be stressors and cause disruption in the academic journey. Having been away for the lengthy duration of deployment takes its toll on relationships with spouse, friends, and family. Two of the project participants had returned to the States only to be greeted by the failure of their marriages. For Tim, dealing with divorce resulted in his having to withdraw for a

semester. Jacob's infant son was born with health issues that required hospitalization, and he had to withdraw for a semester to care for his family.

The housing costs in Silicon Valley add its own stresses as students face high costs of living, and long commutes from their residences to campus. Living far from campus can act as a hindrance to participating in evening and weekend events on campus that foster a sense of community.

"...events that are on weekends, or evenings or what not, that are based in San Jose. For the most part, I've had to as a rule decline because I can't make that drive out for a 2 hour dinner." – Jacob

Assessment: It is safe to say that all project participants saw a college education, and their own journey towards earning their degrees, in a very positive light.

There were things that they missed from their time in the military. Greg, when asked about what specifically he missed, answered:

"It's a lot of the stuff, like camaraderie, steady pay. I had a free place to live, free meals, probably the best health benefits I've had yet, and probably ever will have. As well as I miss the adventure of it, the adrenaline rush you get doing certain things. Yeah, I think there's quite a bit." - Greg

However, they all spoke about the promise of economic security, career advancement, and personal growth that higher education held for them. Not one of the 13 participants said that he or she regretted enrolling in college.

Self: *Experiencing* the transition from the military to student life

The definition of self varies for each student reflecting their unique identity even as it embraces certain commonalities based on the experiences of being in a warzone. The self acts as a filter through which each student experiences his or her own transition to college life. Aspects of the self play a large part in determining the chances of successfully completing college education. Personal and demographic characteristics - gender, socioeconomic status, stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity, and age- directly affect how a person perceives and assesses life (Goodman et al 2006). Additionally, an individual's psychological resources- ego development, outlook, commitment, and values- also affect how they cope with the transition.

Gender: None of the male Veterans spoke about how being male influenced their transition differently. Two of the project participants are female Veterans. Gender influenced their perceptions of how they saw themselves. While neither of them indicated that being a female affected either their academic progress, or classroom experience in any manner, they both spoke about feeling isolated from other Veterans, specifically other female Veterans, on campus. Edna, who was an officer in the US Army, said that she felt she had two hurdles to overcome in connecting with other student Veterans on campus.

“They have a VSO (Veterans Students Organization) club, but it’s not really active. Then there’s the added layer that one, I’m an officer, and two, I’m female. And they are predominantly enlisted

men...There's a sort of separation in terms of responsibility or what you do. Even amongst (the other student Veterans on campus), you don't have many people within my own..." - Edna

This expression "my own" indicates how Edna perceives herself as being different from the typical student Veteran on campus.

Lily did not seem to mind the isolation from other female Veterans as much, but spoke about how she thought male student Veterans' might hold erroneous perceptions about her, because she is female.

"..I can already assume what the male Veteran might think of a female Veteran just because of being around guys all the time (in the military). But I'm used to it...You just know the whole male mentality after a whole year of being with them for more than 12 hours a day. The typical male Veteran, I would assume, would be immature depending on what age they are. They'd think that because of (my) job, (I) didn't do anything, (that I'm) this rank because I am female." - Lily

These assumptions that Lily made signals that she thought of herself as more mature than male Veterans, and more capable, than what she assumed male Veterans gave her credit for. Additionally, when the topic came up, some of male participants also offered opinions on the challenges female student Veterans face. Jacob, said that he thinks being a female Veteran would be more isolating than a male Veteran on campus. Greg expressed thoughts on the stresses of not only being female but also feminine, the latter of which is not a trait associated with the military.

“I think women Veterans, on any given school campus, have probably a lot more hurdles to cross. Especially when there really isn’t that much known, it hasn’t been until the last couple of years that their experiences haven’t really been known. It’s always been seen as women in the military, they don’t see that much combat. These current wars, that’s been completely changed. You have women coming out that have combat experience. They’ve seen a lot of messed up stuff. For them, it can be very challenging back in the civilian world in trying to maintain an education while trying to maintain a feminine image. Plus they are not as vocal as male Veterans are about their experience or even about them being a Veteran.” - Greg

Socio-economic status: Socio-economic status is an individual’s position within a hierarchical social structure, which depends on a combination of variables including occupation, education, income, wealth, and place of residence. All project participants were in the process of improving their socioeconomic status. For the purposes of this project, the relevant factors in understanding how socioeconomic status impacts the transition experience are the ability to pay for college and basic expenses, and the interaction between project participants and their peers, and faculty members. The latter is influenced by the fact that all the participants had an occupation, broadly the military, and specifically their individual roles as determined by rank and branch of service, before entering college. Moreover, they were all used to authority- both following it, as well as enforcing it, in some capacity. They had all had responsibilities in a war zone that

are outside the realm of those shouldered by traditional students, and this led to some noteworthy dynamics within a classroom setting.

While tuition and related college expenses are a concern for most students, traditional or otherwise. As stated earlier, eight of the 13 project participants joined the military in order to avail of the GI Bill benefits later. What distinguishes student Veterans is that separation from the military to go to college also entails leaving a steady paycheck. Seeking a college education as a full-time student usually means that one has limited income during the time one is a student. For those student Veterans with families and children to support, the temporary loss of income can seem daunting. 12 of the 13 participants were paying for their college education through the educational benefits of the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Daniel, an undergraduate at Stanford University received financial aid from the institution, and was in a position to save his benefits for graduate school.

Edna was eligible for only 80% of her college tuition and expenses to be covered by the GI Bill. She lived at home with her parents to save money on housing and other expenses. Blue's mother helped supplement the educational benefits he got from the military, to help pay for his education. Peter spoke about how crucial the GI Bill benefits were, especially for those dealing with PTSD symptoms. Here, he is speaking about the average student Veteran suffering from PTSD and their dependence on the GI Bill benefits:

“I just need to concentrate on getting myself enrolled if I want to go back to education and my food, my cell phone bill, and my rent; it’s one less additional stresses (student Veterans) don’t have to think about ...for somebody with PTSD ok? Stress can build up so much so much to a point where, you know, because they don’t know how to cope with the stress-it can be a problem it could lead into the depression.” - Peter

While Peter spoke more in the abstract, Greg was experiencing the stress of the exhaustion of funds during the time of the interview.

“I’m on the Post-9/11 bill and it ends for me next month. After that I’m done. That’s actually, that’s been my huge stress factor right now. I have to figure out how to pay for what I have left to do plus pay for rent, because I live here on campus.” - Greg

All participants had become acculturated to certain military protocols by virtue of having served in a war zone. These protocols included respecting authority, maintaining discipline, demonstrating leadership, and handling varying degrees of responsibility. Some of these protocols did not translate over smoothly to the classroom setting. A few of the participants raised the issue of how they felt that their peers from a non-military background were disrespectful in class to the instructor. This did not sit well with Blue, who spoke about how students talking while class was in session and the instructor was teaching showed disrespect to the instructor as well as to fellow students.

“What I recall is last week, even yesterday, (some students) were like, let me see your paperwork, oh, let me see, are we doing this today, when the professor is speaking, which is not respecting the instructor and me” - Blue

Edna specifically spoke about how her status as an officer in the US Army followed her into the classroom and sometimes caused a conflict in her interactions with other students- in this case, when working on a group project:

“And it’s partly because I’ve had a ridiculous amount of responsibility when it comes to managing projects and things like that. In the Army where I start to take the teach role, and doing project development, project management, timelines, accountability, communication. And then being the enforcer and bearer of standards. Just puts me in the position of being an asshole if I want to get a good grade. Not that some of those guys don’t care, but group projects are more work for me because I’m having to account for not just my work, but other people’s work.” - Edna

These feelings were rooted in the discipline and the belief that one should always be “pulling one’s weight” especially in a war zone where mutual trust and inter-dependence are matters of life and death. When asked about their interactions with their peers, in setting like group projects, most participants expressed reservations about working with other people. There was a sense that not everyone in the group was as committed to the success of the project. Often

students would have difficulty juggling schedules and setting up meetings with other group members to work on the project.

The military is a structured organization with rank clearly determining hierarchy. College is less structured in comparison- nobody is mandating what time students wake up, and apart from classes, determining the schedule they follow throughout the day. However, even in college, there exists a hierarchy that separates students from instructors. Student Veterans can chafe against that separation, especially if the instructor is younger than themselves, and offers opinions in the classroom that are perceived as being misinformed.

“Being an older guy, I have professors I am older than. That’s been challenging as well as it was in the military, having somebody who is younger than me, but they outrank me. They’re in a position that’s above me. But I respect that, as long as they show me mutual respect, I have no problem with that. At times with professors, they’ve done nothing but school. They haven’t had a real job. And then having them impart all this wisdom, it’s like- you don’t know what the hell you’re talking about, you really don’t. So it is kind of challenging in that respect being in the school environment.” - Greg

For Greg, his occupation in the military is a large part of his socioeconomic status, despite having left the organization. He also misses the camaraderie he shared with his unit, and that comes through when he talks about how the hierarchy between professor and student makes him feel shut out even though he is closer in age to some professors than his fellow students.

*“Coming in to grad school, there’s still that hierarchy with some people. It comes through in different ways- you only refer to me as Dr. so-and-so. It establishes that- this is who *I* am, and this is who *you* are. I think there’s definitely still that hierarchy structure within academics. It’s kind of unnecessary, I think. To me an education should be pretty open. Not saying that everyone’s best friends, but there’s a way to establish that- I’m the instructor and you’re the students. But in ways to where it’s not, I want to say demeaning, but almost kind of insulting. Really you’re telling somebody I have a piece of paper, or I have three letters at the end of my last name that says this, and therefore I’m better than you and you have to listen to me because I know everything And that’s definitely the mentality I walked away with here, is that I’m not part of a club.” -*

Greg

Socioeconomic status is only one of the variables that comprise one’s sense of self, and the above quotation from Greg illustrates how closely it is tied to age, to the desire to belong, and to feeling supported by faculty.

Stage of life and age: Student Veterans are returning from warzones where they have likely shouldered responsibility for the safety of other people. They have also developed skills that students enrolling right after high school may not have. This work experience, and being older than the traditional student are what set them apart in terms of the stage of life that they are in. Having been through and survived deployments in warzones tempers their perspectives on the level of stress college entails. Among other older students, some Veterans may be many years removed from high school or prior college experience, and may feel a lack

of confidence in returning to a formal program of education. Yet, in comparison to what they have already been through, they consider themselves better equipped to deal with academic challenges.

“And then also its helps in terms of complaining- studying is easy, going into Iraq is hard. Yeah, I’m tired but it’s not bad. I’m fat and happy and I have an indoor sanitation system, so I’m fine.” - Edna

I have previously discussed how age makes my project participants feel isolated from their peers.

“I’m 31 years old, a good 5,6,7,8 years older than the others, particularly in the undergraduate classes. A bunch of these younger kids who’ve never paid a bill, or their toughest days is their boyfriend not texting them to go to Subway. [One feels] isolated in a sense, or just separate from your classmates just because you are from a totally different background.” - Edna

Age is inextricably connected with stage of life, or background as Edna puts it, and both put together can make it more difficult to connect with the student community on campus.

State of health: I did not include any questions in my interview instrument regarding the participant’s state of health- physical, or otherwise. However, some participants themselves brought up the topic when asked about the challenges to the transition from the military to college. I did not interrupt, neither did I prompt them to share more than they volunteered. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

(PTSD), as a result of deployment, was the most frequently discussed condition. Greg talked about how PTSD affected him as a student. He worried about the professor thinking he wasn't paying attention in class.

"I do have issues with PTSD. Sometimes my brain will just drift off in class. I look like I'm not paying attention. I kind of say it so that if you see me doing that, it's not like I don't give a shit or I'm not interested. Sometimes my brain goes off somewhere else, and then it'll come back." - Greg

He also thinks that PTSD is a label with stigma attached to it. This stigma worries him because of how he thinks others will view him.

"People hear (I have PTSD) and will think, oh, he's fucking nuts. Like I'm some crazy combat Veteran like a Vietnam era dude. That's the common misconception people have." - Greg

Lily felt that faculty and students in the community college she attended before transferring to SJSU offered opinions on the wars without having complete knowledge of the political events of the time, or their effect on service members' mental health. She did not want to speak out and contradict anyone overtly, but at the same time, she felt like she needed to vent. She, therefore, chose to write about PTSD in order to give her feelings a voice.

"I wrote a paper on PTSD that let me vent out everything I wanted to talk about that I didn't say in class because there were people who really irritated me. That's pretty much it." - Lily

When asked why she didn't want to speak out on PTSD, she talked about how she wanted to avoid being labeled as someone suffering from PTSD. She recollected the medical evaluation for PTSD when she was released from the military.

“When we come back from deployment, we have to go through a medical screening and we have to do this PTSD questionnaire with someone personally and electronically. I didn't want to say anything in fear that that it was me who had the problem, and I didn't want to break down. So I just didn't say anything.” - Lily

Student Veterans also suffer from other war-related injuries which may or may not be physically apparent. Some project participants had seen their comrades being killed in battle, or commit suicide over adjustment troubles after their military tenure was over. Blue spoke about getting disability compensation from the military. He was evaluated with a 100% disability upon separation from the military, even though I could discern no obvious physical signs during our interview. He also spoke about attending PTSD counselling sessions with a friend from the military who was suicidal and implied that the friend had taken his own life which stopped Blue from attending any more of the sessions.

Peter divulged that he suffered from PTSD, depression, stress, anxiety and adjustment anxiety and was seeking counselor support to deal with these conditions as he tried to complete college. He also made the point that it is very difficult to transition smoothly when one has witnessed a close friend dying on the battlefield.

“let’s say (a soldier) goes into another deployment and all of a sudden their best friend, who they worked with hand in hand you know gets shot, dies from their wounds. They come back, they try to transition now, you know that person that experienced that? You know, hey, and they realize you know, like, wow that person who was there for me to confide in and that support, you know, it’s no longer there. So that cohesion, that camaraderie, that goes down, that morale goes down. And then it’s like a slippery slope in the way that, you know, first here comes the depression and, you know, the numbness that comes with it, and what the culture itself teaches is if you feel that way just drink, because that’s what everybody does you know, and that’s why you get like these substance abuse problems.” - Peter

Edna spoke about how her injuries post-deployment had left her unable to concentrate as well as she used to. This hindered her ability to finish tests in the time allotted because it took her longer to recall the answers. Greg spoke about how injuries suffered from war trauma negatively affect confidence and self-esteem.

“That’s a tricky one because the military does give you a lot of self-confidence. But when you go through combat and come back out, I don’t want to say takes it away, but it does diminish to a certain extent. Leaving the military I equate to, although I don’t really know specifically because I haven’t had this experience, but it’s like a really bitter divorce. It’s something you love doing, but hate at the same time. You never want anything to do with ever again, but once you’re out, you’re like, but I really want back in, I really want it back, I miss it, this is what I need. It builds you up, but at the same

time, it can tear you down. Because of issues I have with PTSD and stuff like that, it really makes me question my own confidence and what I am able to do.” - Greg

Deployment to a war zone has enormous repercussions on the state of health. PTSD, and other war-related injuries like Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), loss of limb, depression, anxiety, sleeplessness are all factors that hamper the student Veteran’s transition to college, and to civilian life in general.

Psychological resources: These are defined as the “personality characteristics that people draw upon to help them withstand threats” (Pearlin and Schooler 1978). Psychological resources include ego development, outlook, commitment, and values. The nature of these resources, and the extent to which individuals are able to draw from them dictate how they cope with the transition. Two individuals facing the same transition, in this case that of moving from service member to student, will experience it differently based on their psychological coping resources. A wide variety of experiences shaped the project participants’ psychological makeup. Some psychological resources were attributed to their shared experience of having been in the military, and having been deployed to a war zone. Psychological resources can be thought of as those traits that have been internalized and which play a significant role in creating a frame of reference through which a transition is experienced. These are different from strategies to cope with the transition. Psychological resources are longer lasting

and are viewed as personality characteristics, as opposed to strategies that are more short-term tools to address specific issues that crop up during a transition.

There are several desirable traits that make for a good student. The military experience, along with age and increased maturity, equips Veterans with certain skills that could increase the likelihood of succeeding in college and graduating within the allotted time frame. The most commonly mentioned traits that surfaced during data analyses from the interviews were focus, motivation, and discipline. These were expressed in terms of understanding why one is in college in the first place. Enrolling into college was a commitment that the project participants had made to themselves, and were prepared to see it through as best as they could.

“Well, I guess [I better understand] the value of an education, because I am paying for it and I know why I need it, I think better than some of my peers are doing it because you go to high school, you go to college, maybe grad school. I definitely have a roadmap for why I’m doing it, or the importance of it.” - Edna

Focus as a trait was also expressed in the way studies had become a priority despite other responsibilities vying for one’s time. This gain in focus was sometimes attributed directly to the military training that the participants had been through.

“I think it’s my military experience that has really kind of helped me in that I can stay focused on stuff usually, pretty well. It’s hard for me to want to quit something. Believe me, there have been times,

even through grad school, where I've been like, fuck it, walk away from it, be done. I know I'll never do that because that's just how I am. And that's the part of me that the military has shaped - that never quit attitude." - Greg

Besides increased focus, discipline and motivation were other traits that were directly attributed to military tenure.

"It's motivation, discipline, what else, oh detail-oriented. All those factors really helped when I was in the military. And it does help now shaping the way I think about things, the way I do things. I also think, that stems from personal character too though. You can try to instill these things into people while they are in the military, once they are out and on their own, they dump it, forget about it and go back to the life they have. I'm trying to hold on to some of those things. I think it's made me pretty successful in school." -

Matt

College is not easy, but the participants mentioned that if they had successfully survived the military, then they could be confident of making it through college. Deployment and return from a war zone helped put a perspective on days that were especially challenging because of heavy course load.

"And then in the military, you have to do things, you have to work hard and you have to put your work ahead of yourself. In many ways, if you're taking 18 units, you have to stay up late, you can't go out, you definitely have to be committed to what you're doing. It helps giving me more discipline and higher standards." - Edna

This positive attitude was accompanied by the build-up of confidence that the participants mentioned was a direct by-product of their time in service.

“The things that helped me succeed when I got out is realizing that, from Iraq specifically, being uncertain of whether or not you are going to survive; being in these extremely hostile conditions, being in combat and all that. When I finally came back and got out, it just seemed like everything else was pretty easy. It drove up my self-confidence. I never thought of the Marine Corps would have this many benefits in the long run. But I guess I just realized that those experiences count for something. And that if you utilize them in the correct way, you can steer yourself where you want to go.” - Daniel

“Yeah, my confidence is built up. Like I said, I never used to speak up in class. I was very shy. Now I feel like I have more to give, to offer, to contribute to society, to school. It feels great.” - Lily

Peter talked about how self-reliance has helped him with getting more out of his higher education journey.

“I’m adaptive is how I’ve noticed that like if I can’t find something within like in the text book, you know, if I can’t find it in Google, I’ll look for more resources. I’ll go to the library; if I can’t find it in the library, you know, I’ll go to a professional that’s working on something I’m studying and I’ll engage or interact I’ll ask to schedule things. I’ll learn more about the subject and I think from that, you know, it just shows like this whole concept of adapting and overcoming what might be difficult for me to learn. It’s obtainable as long as I know the right avenues.” - Peter

As the participants adapted to their military lives, they developed some personal creeds that they strived to live by.

“When you go into the army you’ll have some you’ll have some creeds you’ll have a couple things you will live by. What do I mean live by is you’ll have respect, okay your motto, so it helped me have a lot of respect, honor, duty, dignity.” - Blue

It is impossible to generalize and say that all student Veterans will exhibit all the desired traits. Some of these traits might actually lull one into falsely assuming that college is much easier than it actually is. Greg confirmed this by speaking about his own experience when he did not do as well as he expected to because he was over-confident.

“My first semester didn’t go as well as I thought it was going to. I walked in all cocky thinking, this is going to be easy. I graduated honors in my undergrad program, this is going to be a breeze. But it wasn’t. It really put me into check. But I still pushed myself to keep going.” - Greg

Despite forming a motto around respect, honor, duty, and dignity as a student, Blue spoke about feeling less free than he did in the US Army. He described the US Army as the biggest, and the richest “gang” in the world. He said, with visible pride, that he was nicknamed “gangster” by the locals he worked with when deployed in Afghanistan. When asked to contrast his life as service member with that of a civilian, he said:

“The life as soldier is really free. I was the law. Yeah, I had a gun, I had everything, I still do. I have my own pistol. When you’re in the military (in a war zone), you have to remember, like you are the military, you are the government; so who is going to tell you what to do besides those who are with you? Yeah when you are overseas you have a gun there is only one way to go it’s me or you.” - Blue

Most participants were hesitant to volunteer that they served in the military to their professors or to their peers in the classroom unless there it was explicitly asked. The reasons for doing so ranged from risking uncomfortable questions around how many enemies one killed during war, to feeling awkward about the reactions one might get to this information. Edna felt that if she voluntarily self-identified as a Veteran to a professor, the latter might assume she was “potentially fucked up”. She also feared reactions of pure hostility, though she pointed out that neither had occurred at SJSU.

Tim carefully selected under which circumstances to volunteer information on his military background. He also remarked that given the age difference between his college peers and himself, they may not identify with the events that launched the country into war. Those events made a lasting impression on him.

“I don’t talk about the wars unless I feel like it’s appropriate, or if I have stories I want to tell I guess. But otherwise, it just...then sometimes I get asked a lot of questions. I guess that is, I don’t know, it’s hard to relate cuz then you have to explain context, and situations. I don’t have a problem with it. Just sometimes its, not annoying, but just...and the wars have been going on for so long that people just look at it differently. When I first started at school,

there was this whole debate of whether we should be over there. This was before Bush's second election. I started at school right after the election. The Iraq war was a huge debate in the country. [Now] When you talk about it with kids who were in junior high when 9/11 happened, it's just they don't really have the same views or anything like that. Those things impacted me tremendously...when 9/11 happened, my world went from calm to chaos in 20 minutes." - Tim

Jacob encountered a professor at a community college he attended before transferring to SJSU who he described as being anti-military and anti-Veteran. Jacob volunteered his Veteran status in class. He attributes his low grades in that class to the professor's negative attitude towards Jacob's Veteran status. This has made him reluctant to volunteer his status again. He is quick to point out though, that on the SJSU campus, the reactions he has received have been mostly those of "confused interest." He finds the SJSU campus to be more politically liberal, as he suspects most college campuses must be compared to the areas surrounding them. His assessment is that students and professors at SJSU may be anti-military, but they are pro-Veteran.

Lily opined that the SJSU campus was "too close to the liberals," and that there was no overt display of patriotism on campus. She had accepted it as part of the culture of the school and didn't let it bother her.

Daniel, an undergraduate at Stanford, was of the contrary opinion. His experience was that the reaction he received when he divulged that he was a Veteran was very positive. It opened many doors that would normally not be

available to most students. He was invited to parties hosted by retired US Secretaries of State. These opportunities motivated him to do his best at school.

Jacob discussed another, less obvious way, in which transition is experienced by student Veterans. He talked about witnessing the challenges of having to switch from “Army English” to “American English”.

“I’ve seen the issue on other vets, not necessarily on myself. The language barrier- The switch back from Army English to American English has frustrated a number of vets. There were a couple of them that I helped out. Essentially, I had to translate for them, for the first month or two once they got out and got back to college life. They would ask a teacher- Hey, when are your office hours?- and they’d say- at 2:30- and the person would look at them kind of funny and I’d have to supply- he means 1430. Oh, so not 2:30 in the morning.” - Jacob

This quotation ties in to the “culture shock” that some of the participants expressed when asked about challenges to the transition.

“When I got out of the military it was a really big culture shock. There was many days, I think it was for the first month I would just sit around, I had all this time in my day, I would wake up really early, and I had all this time in my day, like nobody telling me what to do, what's my deal. I'm really lost. I didn't know what to do, I had all this time on my hands, what do I do now?” - Aidan

Matt said that he felt disconnected from the people around him as he tried to overcome the culture shock he experienced after getting out of the military. Lily

articulated the isolation accompanying the culture shock as being put in a situation where she is unable to trust anyone, because they do not have the same military experiences as her and are not privy to the military culture.

“You don’t know where people are from...they are not wearing uniforms, so you don’t know who they are. You can’t tell who is nice, and who is not.” - Lily

The level of structure encountered in the military is a lot higher than that on campus. The participants expressed how they enjoyed having the freedom to decide how to spend their time, and not having to abide by a rigid schedule that dictated every minute of their day. However, very quickly, this abundance of time without a clear structure to it also caused anxiety and confusion.

“it was definitely two different worlds going from a soldier in the military and then going out, cuz all of a sudden you're not on a tight agenda anymore, and then you no longer have all these priorities. At the same time that is really good initially, but eventually it starts to hurt you, cuz you're not in that practice, you're not constantly waking up early in the morning at the same time, doing this thing, prioritizing your day to get all these tasks done... And over the years you start to lose that sense of purpose on how you have to do all your stuff. You lose it in the sense of day, your scheduling of your day” - Aidan

Edna talked about struggling with the freedoms that students have on campus that she deemed unacceptable.

“But, the other thing in terms of military systems versus school systems, things I don’t necessarily like about SJSU is I think, in terms of the political correctness, the student rights. Students have rights, which is a totally foreign concept to me. I mean, it has a place, but it can be misconstrued or people can be afraid of it. It’s a tool that some of the teachers are afraid of. A teacher can’t talk about my grades in front of other students. I have yet to see or call out or discipline somebody who is not behaving in class. Which is surprising to me, you’re 23 years old, shut up and listen to what the teacher is saying. Or students are blatantly cheating and the teacher is not doing anything about it in my mind.” - Edna

All of these factors impact the student Veterans’ sense of self and act as a filter through which they describe and experience higher education.

Support and Strategy - Tools used in *adapting* to higher education:

Support is the help available to the student in the form of instructors, graduate students, classmates, friends, other Veterans and family. It is also the help available from the institution of higher education through policies and procedures that make college a supportive environment for the student. Support can be the vital factor in determining the chances that student Veterans will successfully complete college requirements for graduation. The support as desired from instructors, peers, other Veterans, and family and friends is addressed in more detail in the next chapter.

Institutional support. Optimizing the chances of success of students with functional limitations transitioning from the military should be an institutional responsibility. SJSU, as an institution, has policies and services in place to foster a supportive environment for student Veterans. The project participants spoke about how they have benefited from the policies, and utilized the services. They also discussed the hurdles they faced in availing of some services, and they gave recommendations where they felt SJSU could do better.

The Veterans Services Office (VSO) was repeatedly highlighted as being extremely helpful in assisting students with claiming state and federal education benefits and was roundly considered instrumental in making this process very smooth for the project participants.

“I work through [the coordinator at the Veterans Services Office at SJSU] here, yeah they set me up with a path so I was on track and that was really helpful to you know plan out my future as far as what classes I needed to take and just keep me on the right path. The money just came with just a few forms and paperwork and it was really simple.” - James

James’ comment is emblematic of what all the participants from SJSU had to say about getting the paperwork filled out accurately and in time to claim educational benefits. The VSO at SJSU is working to eliminate confusion and anxiety from an important step in the journey through higher education.

Getting priority registration to add classes as a Veteran was another policy that was commended by nearly all the project participants. These interviews were

conducted in 2011, when SJSU was going through severe budget cuts resulting in fewer classes. Getting the classes they needed when many classes were impacted was definitely seen as a positive benefit of having served. All the participants spoke about feeling older than their traditional peers on campus. They all felt that their age, along with life experience, set them apart from students who enrolled right after high school. Additionally, some of them had financially dependent spouses and young children. Policies such as allowing the transfer of military credits, which SJSU already has in place, enable student Veterans to graduate faster if they so choose, and enter the workplace sooner. Offering priority registration is another step in this direction.

From my own experience as a student at SJSU at the time, there were students, mostly undergraduates, who had to delay their graduation plans because they were unable to add classes that were required but were filled to capacity and unavailable. Granting top priority to register is a thoughtful way to recognize the sacrifices that the men and women in uniform have made, and is a policy that was uniformly appreciated by the project participants.

The application form for admission to SJSU asks the applicant about their Veteran status. This creates an expectation that the information will be used in sending Veteran specific information to the applicant upon acceptance to SJSU. Lily talked about getting a Veterans' packet from a school other than SJSU that she applied to and where she was accepted. The packet had information on how to connect with other Veterans on campus, and a list of all the resources

designed to help with a smooth transition. She felt like this was missing from the welcome packet from SJSU, and wished that it were included as a first step towards welcoming Veterans to the school. Edna echoed the same.

“I think where the campus could be more welcoming is in the application process. When you fill out the application, it asks you if you’re a Veteran. It asks you, but it’s like that information doesn’t apparently go anywhere. I don’t know if it factors into the decisions process. But it’s not like once you are in, they’ve retained that information that you’re a Veteran, maybe add to your admissions packet, and again, we offer these services or this is available or things of that nature... The school already has knowledge that I’m a Veteran, you have an expectation if they ask the question- Oh I’m a Veteran, they want to know, are they going to put me in touch with these kind of resources” - Edna

When asked how SJSU was doing in terms of connecting Veterans on campus, the participants offered mixed opinions on the topic. Matt believed that the school was on the right track because he saw more events that focus on student Veterans and service members on campus. He thought there was more awareness on campus regarding Veterans’ issues, and he was appreciative of this. Campus events for Veterans, where students meet alumni Veterans, also allowed them to start building their network on campus.

“I think they are mindful of us coming back, and it is showing a lot more now with a lot of programs that are developing for Veterans who are returning. The school is on the right track with the

programs. They are acknowledging us, which is very different from when I first started in 2006. Nothing was being sent out, nobody was reaching out to Veterans. Today, it's a lot more active. The school is on the right track." - Matt

Others felt that more effort could go into providing more avenues through which they could network with other Veterans on campus. As stated earlier in this report, Veterans categorize themselves further by gender, by branch of service, and by rank. While broader events targeted at all Veterans are certainly required, there is also value in smaller scale events that try to cluster together groups that share even more in common.

"SJSU really does do a lot to make vets feel comfortable and at home. If there was a way to pro-actively link up Veterans that were of a more specific group, instead of just saying let's get all the vets together, If you look up- alright, well, let's see- these 3 guys were in the Army, around the same time, so they'd have similar stories. That'd be a good group to get together. Email the 3 of them. Or, these 4 Navy guys happened to have served on the same ship or what have you." - Jacob

There is also a clearly unmet need regarding training faculty and staff to be more aware of Veterans' issues in higher education. This was expressed multiple times during the interviews.

"Well, at least they should potentially [go through training on having Veterans in the classroom]. Obviously (faculty) are intelligent

people, but they need to be better aware of some of the demographics of the classroom.” - Edna

The age gap and the feelings of isolation that entails, the loss of camaraderie, the myriad challenges accompanying a role change from service member to student, the concurrent stressors, of which health plays a huge part, are some of the topics running the gamut of Veterans’ issues of which faculty and staff should be more aware.

“The military isn’t like a regular 9 to 5 job- you quit it, you’re done. It’s always with you. I think stuff like that would be great, kind of bridging the gap Veterans’ issues and creating an understanding among staff and faculty.” - Greg

Participants spoke about the stigma of PTSD and other war related injuries that are not physically evident. These injuries will impact the student Veterans’ performance, and training faculty to recognize and handle these situations will go a long way in mitigating their negative effects.

“There needs to be an understanding that, especially recently returning Veterans fall into a gray period medically. I had a concussion while I was deployed, but this is the first activity where I’ve actually had to think. And so, I don’t know medically the fall out in terms of disability or how it affects me to study. I don’t know exactly what category I fall into, so professors need to be cognizant of that.” - Edna

Along with training for faculty and staff on Veterans' issues, there was also a need expressed for a class for student Veterans to learn how to deal with transition issues. Such a class is already in place on the SJSU campus. Run by psychology professor Dr. Elena Klaw, the course titled "Warriors at Home: Succeeding in College, Life, and Relationships " discusses Veteran specific issues such as PTSD, TBI, depression, anxiety and healthy relationships. It focuses on equipping Veterans with tools to navigate the university, the skills to develop healthy interpersonal relations. The course also helps Veterans develop a career plan.

"They need to have some sort of transitional class. You are definitely going from one culture to another culture."- Edna

This course also identifies the essential resources on campus for student Veteran success. These include the Accessible Education Center, formerly called the Disability Resource Center (DRC), on campus that works with students with disabilities both in the classroom as well as on campus. There was some dissatisfaction with the service expressed by one of the project participants.

"I ran into some problems with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) on campus. The process of that was really discouraging. They want all this paper work, I gave them the paperwork, and was still not getting any response from them. I was trying to go through it just to get that stupid little card that said I need more time on a test. That process in itself is very, yeah, I don't know. It's very frustrating. For me it was very frustrating. I already have all this

documentation from the VA showing I have these problems. It's not like I'm making this stuff up. So to have to go through another process with the school to meet with the counselor and get all this paperwork to get a stupid little card was just frustrating.” - Greg

There was also dissatisfaction expressed with the length of time it took to see an academic counselor who was trained in Veterans' issues.

“I can't speak as nicely about the office counselors. I try to understand their situation, their point of view. But I don't think they're very effective. I've gone to see them about minor things on my transcript or things that are issues that are coming up in the school year. First of all, it's really hard to, cuz you have to go through secretaries/screeners, and they're really tough to get through you tell them your whole issue and then they decide if it's worthy or not worthy. If they decline it, you're like: how do I get an appointment? Well, counselors aren't taking any new people, you have to wait like a month.” - Matt

Apart from institutional services, the participants also discussed classroom practices that instructors have in place. Students spend the bulk of their time on campus attending class, and practices that are viewed as being supportive contribute greatly to making the transition easier. Having an instructor who took the trouble to know everyone's name made Edna feel valued as a student and feel welcome in class.

“I know one of the teachers took everyone's picture so she could memorize everybody's names. It's a simple thing, but at the same time, there're teachers who don't know your name. Ok, you don't

know my name, I get it, but it's definitely a more welcoming environment when someone takes the time to recognize you as an individual." - Edna

Being older than their peers in the classroom, having multiple commitments away from campus, and not having been in a college environment can make a student Veteran feel like they are missing out on things that their better networked peers take advantage of. Here, Edna talks about a simple strategy that one of her professors employs to make sure everyone has equal access to resources.

"The other thing I liked, which is a problem too for anybody coming in the middle of SJSU graduate program, and having to take undergraduate prerequisites, he emailed everybody the last four or five exams that he had done. Because that's the problem, people have old exams. I don't necessarily know those people to get that information, so I liked the fact that he made it more fair. People were not necessarily punished for information that was given in prior semesters. It definitely makes you feel like you're on the same footing as other people. Somebody doesn't have an unfair advantage because they're well-liked, better connected, or been in the program longer." - Edna

One quotation relates to something that the Veteran initiated, but could be included as standard communication from faculty to students registered for their class.

“The other thing I did, and I would recommend it to others, I emailed teachers and asked how many hours they expected me to do in these classes realistically. I specifically took one class instead of another one because the teacher said it would be an average workload. I would tell someone if they haven’t been back to school- Don’t be shy, just ask. This is where I’m at, these are my transcripts, this is where I see myself, how much work do you foresee me putting into class, I think they’ll be honest with you.” - Edna

A welcoming atmosphere in class engages students and encourages learning. Jacob offered a simple suggestion on how instructors can make a difference.

“(This) may be a very small thing, but I think it’s significant, is the capacity to smile in class. Not a lot of professors do it, and it really helps with the atmosphere in class. Having any sort of joking atmosphere, even the occasional dry pun here and there helps to lighten it up a lot. If it’s just straight lecture, poker-face the whole time, it’s kind of off-putting.” - Jacob

James also discussed how inserting real life anecdotes relating to the classroom material made an instructor’s lectures more interesting and engaging. Real-life experiences helped to bring the concepts to life, and he best remembered lectures where the instructor did this.

Strategies: Strategies are another set of tools that individuals employ to tackle the challenges of transition. As pertains to this project, strategies are coping mechanisms employed by the student Veterans in their transition to higher

education. These are, by no means, unique to student Veterans. However, I include them in my report because these are strategies that were discussed by the project participants, and it is my hope that other students, including Veterans, might benefit from this section.

When asked what made them different from their peers on campus, all the project participants brought up how they were much older than others in class. Some participants also acknowledged that this not only brought maturity, but also imposed some limitations on what they were able to do. Acculturating to a college environment for the very first time, or after years of being away from it, can be a slow process for non-traditional students. Recognizing this is, in itself, a coping strategy to handle the pressures of coursework and academic demands.

“You have to remind yourself I haven’t been to school in eight years, I haven’t taken a chemistry class in 10-12 years. So if I’m not doing well, there’s probably a reason for it. People make the mistake that they assume they are not smart enough to take the class, rather than not working hard enough. It’s not an intelligence issue, it’s an issue of effort.” - Edna

Jacob, father to two young sons, spoke about the detrimental effects of sleep deprivation, and making a conscious effort to get enough hours of sleep. This forced him to minimize procrastinating on academic assignments, and created a healthier balance in his schedule. He was able to devote sufficient time to housework and parenting duties.

“I know where my physical abilities are and I know where my intellectual abilities are. I know how far I can push myself studying, know how far I can push myself physically to stay up late to get his paper done. I know when to cut back and realize- alright, its 2 in the morning, I have class in 8 hours. I need to sleep.” - Jacob

One of Aidan’s strategies is to allow himself sufficient time when working on assignment to take frequent breaks to keep the tedium away. He was majoring in Web Design, and found that going away from his desk to take pictures with his camera, or just make a coffee run, were good ways to trigger creativity and generate ideas he used in finishing his assignments. Jacob spoke about the value of repetition in learning new material. He reviews his class notes at the end of each day to help with retention. He also stressed the importance of writing multiple drafts for an assignment. He used the first draft to get his ideas down, and then made subsequent revisions to correct spelling errors, grammatical inconsistencies, and check whether the content made sense. Tim stressed the need for patience as a strategy to deal with frustration.

But in the military you have to have a high level of patience because you have to wait a lot for things. In general, life has taught me to have more patience. Here in school, where other students might get frustrated quickly with things, I guess I don’t. Sometimes [other students] don’t see the larger picture. They just themselves within the smaller part of that picture and they get frustrated. I try to see the whole thing.” - Tim

James thought that being able to do hands-on work helped him learn new information more effectively. He was majoring in Industrial Technology, and found that building circuits, and solving physics problems helped strengthen his understanding of basic concepts learned in class.

Aidan also spoke about doing actual hands-on work to learn concepts and improve understanding. He did an internship to sharpen his skills, build his resume, and start creating his professional network. Jacob, an undergraduate in Anthropology, enrolled in a practicum to work on a project with Masters' students. He was able to attend a conference to showcase his work. This served the dual purposes of building a professional network, as well as motivating him to consider graduate studies after earning his undergraduate degree.

James stated an obvious strategy to increase the chances of academic success- that of not skipping class. Being on time, and preparing for class by doing the assigned reading were also mentioned as other simple but effective strategies. Lily spoke about her strategy to take the time to build some rapport with the instructor.

“Being prepared, just being on time, talking to teachers, which I had never done. I had never had any relationship with any of my professors before. I just never said anything, but now I just speak up, I say things...And if you feel like you should tell a professor ahead of time that you are going to have issues adjusting, that should be addressed. If you're struggling on a certain subject, or

something, talk to your professor. Think of them as your officer, your sergeant or your leader. Think of it that way so you can approach them because they are. They are technically your supervisor, your leader. They are the ones who are going to guide you in the right direction.” - Lily

Lily’s strategy of keeping her professors in the loop and informed, leads into the issue of building a support network to ease the transition into the classroom. This topic is explored more in-depth in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Support Networks

In the previous chapter, I covered institutional support through services that SJSU is already providing to student Veterans, as well as those that were not being provided yet, but are desired. Support also comes in other forms- it could be from faculty and staff, or from other student Veterans on campus, and from personal networks of family and friends. Studies by psychologists and researchers have repeatedly shown that support from family, friends, and the greater community is a critical component to trauma recovery (Herman 1997, Naparstek 2004, Sherman, Zanotti & Jones 2005). On the SJSU campus, the larger community includes faculty, staff, other students, and other student Veterans.

For those who have experienced a trauma, the presence or absence of social support can influence how they handle the resulting feelings of helplessness, horror, fear, and the level of distress and the effect these feelings have on their life (Cantrell & Dean 2005). For Lily, these feelings of not being understood translated into feeling like she was being stared at with hostility.

“When I came back, I just thought everybody was attacking me. I don’t know if that goes for anyone else. Like I said, don’t judge people, and don’t think they’re staring at you because you’re an individual. You are just like anybody else on campus. They don’t know anything about what you did, where you’ve been.” - Lily

For Peter, his marriage suffered as a result of the long separation during deployment. The resulting divorce created additional stress that he struggled with while trying to transition to civilian and college life.

“My transition wasn’t all that great compared to everybody else I mean my wife had left me um yeah-that whole little story that a military member goes -deployment go home wife gone-yeah that happened, accept it and move on right?” - Peter

The main types of support are emotional support, social connection, feeling needed, reassurances of self-worth, advice and information, physical and material assistance (Ingala et al 2013). SJSU may not be in a position to provide all these different kinds of support, but project participants discussed where they felt they were getting adequate support, and also identified gaps where they desired more from faculty, staff, and the larger community on campus.

Faculty/Staff Support – Student Veterans’ Mentoring Program

As Veterans return from war zones and reintegrate into civilian society through higher education, it is imperative that they be engaged by faculty and staff towards successfully achieving their academic goals. This will be accomplished by creating a welcoming environment that recognizes the needs of Veterans who may have returned with war related disabilities and injuries, physically visible or not. These needs go beyond institutional provisions of disability resources centers and counseling.

Like any traditional student, student Veterans will feel the need for a supportive and welcoming environment at SJSU, especially during the first year of study. They will benefit from faculty or staff role models as valuable resources to guide him or her through the college journey. A successful and effective mentor-mentee relationship is an integral part of a comprehensive first year experience for student Veterans. College freshman who are actively engaged by faculty are more likely to return for the sophomore year, and are more likely to graduate college successfully. An interested mentor who provides timely encouragement and motivation also positively influences GPAs (Campbell and Campbell 2007), performance at higher levels, and the overall satisfaction of the college experience, thus leading to increased persistence in staying and completing college (Kuh 2007).

Mentorship is a one-on-one relationship that focuses on providing guidance and enabling the mentee to achieve his or her goals. It is an extremely powerful tool for student development. A mentor can be seen as a role model, an advisor and also a friend to the student Veteran. Mentors' guidance can lead to improved academic performance, development of professional skills, knowledge of industry trends and news, opportunities to network with practicing professionals, information on job vacancies, enhanced personal fulfillment, and satisfaction with their chosen program of study and with SJSU (Johnson 2007). Additionally, it can lead to securing initial employment right out of college. Collaboration with a well-respected faculty mentor can not only help with

navigating the bureaucracy within the university, but can also open the right doors at the beginning of one's career.

"I was going in with my education counselor and we would just talk about our goals and plans and stuff like that. How I am, where I am, if I am on track or not, and what I want to do. And she's really good about introducing me to all these different things going on. Like there's an internship here, Apple has an internship here, we're doing a field trip to IDO, one of the top advertising, online advertising groups out there." - Aidan

While some project participants were successfully able to establish informal mentor-mentee relationships, others spoke about a deep desire to have such a relationship that they felt was missing and looked to faculty to initiate it. The perceived lack of interest from faculty can be quite discouraging as evident by Edna's comment below.

"Anonymity makes it easier to fail, it's not like you're going to disappoint the teacher or yourself. You cannot fail gracefully at [military college] because you are going to catch someone's crap the whole way through. Whereas here, you can just fail away and nobody's going to hurt anybody's feelings on the way out. Or even feel accountable for your work. If I turned in a very bad assignment, a project that was just absolute garbage, I'm a 100 percent confident that the teacher is not going to take my project and go- What the hell were you doing? I know what you're capable of doing and this is crap. What's your problem?- that is not going to happen at SJSU." - Edna

Mentoring need not be a hindrance to the kind of productivity that is typically rewarded by the institutions. In the current academic culture, doing research, teaching, and administrative work occupy much of faculty members' time leaving precious little time to initiate mentorships with students.

“There’s not much dialogue between teachers and students outside of curriculum. [It] needs to be in the transition course- getting back to this student-teacher relationship. It’s hard to even touch on that as a topic. For me it’s been difficult when a teacher hasn’t been prepared or I don’t like how they’re doing this. If I don’t like how they’re doing things, my first reaction is to tell them. The military is no different; it is a continuous improvement process. If you’re doing something that I don’t think is very effective and not very good, to make the whole thing better, I will let you know. Not every teacher wants to hear that.” - Edna

These quotes indicate that there is a need for an institution-supported formal program of mentorship. Student Veterans may enroll in college with the discipline and focus that saw them through their military experience, but they may also be facing transitional challenges as they adapt to a college environment. They may have been away from college for a while, and may need assistance with setting and meeting academic expectations. They may lack honest evaluation and feedback on achievement gaps. They may need help with getting organized to study for tests and submit assignments in a timely manner. They may feel older than their academic cohort. They may also miss the camaraderie of their military unit and feel isolated in a new environment. They

may also be experiencing financial troubles as they wait for educational assistance from the Post-9/11 bill.

A competent mentor who can help guide them past these hurdles should be viewed as someone with strong character, emotional and relational skills, helping orientation, empathy, positive affectivity, warmth, congruence, humility, capacity for closeness (Johnson 2007). At the same time, a successful mentee should be proactive, keep appointments, be open to feedback, accept personal responsibility and admit mistakes, respect the mentor's goals, and be able to communicate openly and honestly. The following quote is evidence that this relationship works when it is a true partnership between the mentor and the mentee.

"I'm always keeping [in touch with] professors who have been really instrumental in keeping me focused and keeping me motivated and supported me. I always try to hook up with them a couple of times during the semester and tell them what's going on and see what kind of information they have. I think I have a good support system here. I'm lucky I got into the McNair program which has really helped me see what grad school [is like] and what it requires." -

Matt

Johnson (2007), in his research, uncovered that that the most frequently cited benefits of mentoring for mentors include personal satisfaction, professional rejuvenation, motivation to remain current, networking opportunities, as well as a reputation of talent development.

Undergraduate students, and particularly freshmen, are at a natural disadvantage when it comes to seeking a mentor. Large student to faculty ratios, uncertainty over declaring an academic major, developmental immaturity, lack of awareness or the understanding of the value of such a relationship can all be hindrances difficult to overcome. These hindrances are compounded for student Veterans who may already feel disconnected from the college environment because of their age, their war related injuries, or any among a number of other factors.

“It’s a full class at 45. It’s sort of the dynamics of Engineering- he lectures, we listen. There’s no real dialogue or communication. I can see where he doesn’t really care. He’s in send mode, I’m in receive mode.” - Edna

An on-campus service that connects prospective mentees to interested mentors will go a long way in setting up student Veterans for success in their academic pursuits by providing a critical platform for developing professional and personal skills. With such a program in place, SJSU can increase retention and graduation rates of not only student Veterans, but of all students.

Faculty and staff that wish to be mentors to student Veterans will need tools and training to better understand the unique characteristics of military experiences that may be absent from their own set of experiences or knowledge base. However, for this effort to be successful, it would need complete University backing. Additional work by staff and faculty would require resources,

remuneration and the support of University leadership through course release time, and stipends for those willing to serve as mentors.

SJSU has recently launched a formal mentoring program that is supported by the Office of Student Affairs. Services will be offered to military and Veteran students across all colleges. Mentees will be matched to mentors based on questionnaires completed by both mentors and mentees. The focus of the mentoring relationship will depend on the needs of the student Veteran, whether it be successfully getting through the first year at college, preparing applications to graduate school, or finding a job after graduation.

Peer Support- Veterans Students' Organization

Programs and services that support the needs of unique groups of students are an important means of making these groups feel welcome on campus. The goal of such a program or service is to promote student success by recognizing the importance of individualized support for a subset of the student body that has unique needs (DiRamio et. al. 2008). While the mentoring program can be viewed as a more formal program as part of the support system student Veterans can benefit from, a more informal program wherein there exist opportunities to share stories, and learn from peers about strategies for successful reintegration is a vital component of support (Demers 2013).

A subtheme that repeatedly cropped up in the interviews conducted as part of this project is that of camaraderie. Respondents spoke of missing the

camaraderie of their military unit and feeling isolated in a new environment on campus. The project participants expressed a need for camaraderie on the college campus, and yet felt alienated and unable to overcome hurdles in establishing connections with other Veteran students. Most of them took little initiative in active engagement or involvement with campus activities organized specifically for their benefit.

They spoke of the desire to connect with other Veterans on campus with whom they might share similar military and war-time experiences. They spoke of how peer support on campus could ease the transition from the military to college. One student Veteran spoke about how it would be nice to be shown the ropes by alumni who had already gone through the process.

“...really probably the best thing that could happen service wise from a Veterans group, is to sit down with whatever incoming Veteran you have and to just go through the process and options of all the things you can do as far as scholarships, GI Bill, as far as what needs to be done, what doesn't need to be done. What are your options as far as academics go? What do you want to major in, where do you want to go? Since most people at those schools are transferring out of community college, you can kind of help them... There're people who go to UC Berkeley, Chico State, East Bay. There's a range of schools that people go to, you can always find someone who has the kind of steps you have to take there, which is good.” - Daniel

For student Veterans, the Veteran Students' Organization (VSO) at SJSU is this additional layer of support that they can depend on. The VSO is a visible, campus-based student-Veterans organization that provides opportunities for Veterans to meet with students who have had similar experiences. The VSO is also a point of connection to the campus and aims to connect past, present, and future members of the Armed Forces and support each other through the transition process of reintegration. Tim summed it up as a vehicle to meet other people and get more involved in campus activities.

“When I started going here, I used to go at night. There wasn’t anything to do on campus. It was just come from work, come here, and then leave. It wasn’t until I started going full time about a year and half ago. Since then I’ve slowly gotten more involved in the school. There are a lot of opportunities to meet people. They started a Vet group last semester. It was nice to meet other veterans.” - Tim

The VSO offers opportunities for student Veterans to take on leadership positions within the organization. These opportunities that allow student Veterans to develop, or continue to develop, leadership skills of integrity so as to enable positive action, accountability, and personal development are also vital (Branker 2009) towards building strong relationships, realizing one’s potential, and striving for eventual success in the college environment.

While most Veterans who were interviewed for this project were aware of this organization and the crucial work it is doing, not everybody participated in the

benefits it could offer. Despite the ease of connecting to the VSO via social networks, some student Veterans were either unaware of the VSO, or did not feel like it was relevant to them.

“I have no idea what the VSO is... No, I did not know there was a Facebook page [for the VSO].” - Jacob

When asked if he is a member of the VSO on the SJSU campus, Matt, a senior at SJSU who served 4 years in the Army replied,

“No, I’m not. I don’t know if it’s a reason or an excuse, but I have a lot of schoolwork which keeps me busy. It’s not high on my priority list. I mean, I should. It might be interesting to meet people who were or are in my position, people with the same background as I have- kind of just being dumped into regular civilian life, with quotations around it, that’s what we call it.” - Matt

Matt felt like he did not have the time to initiate a connection to the VSO. When queried on whether the VSO reached out to him, he responded:

“The Veterans? Yeah, I get emails asking for me to come here, come there. I was part of a survey, a census of people who gave their opinions about the military. The reason I went was because they had free pizza.” - Matt

For those that were not only aware of the VSO, but were also active participants, the benefits were evident.

“The starting of the Veteran Student Organization on campus helped a lot. With that, I found a support network of other people

who had also been in service. We could relate to the issues we have now, or the things we've been through. That helped a lot. That, and also meeting Dr. Jonathan Roth, who has the Burdick Military History project, and also the Veterans and military taskforce which sits on campus. Stuff like that has really helped quite a bit. As far as being able to get stuff done, or having a way that I can voice my opinion, or the opinion of other Veterans to the entire campus and actually have it be heard." - Greg

Peter talked about how the military culture values self-reliance and equates asking for help to showing weakness. He also discusses the benefits he discovered by joining a Veterans' group on campus.

"...acceptance is a big thing with Veterans and you've probably even studied about it in some type of class, psychology or something, um, not every Veteran wants to be helped, not every Veteran wants to be identified and it has a lot to do with the pride issue, you know it's strange, weakness? It shows weakness if you go for help... but the good thing is once you get more involved in, like for me one of the biggest helpers has been establishing Student Veterans' Association (SVA) [at local community college] and getting a group together, and because of that group interaction, we don't talk about our war stories all the time, we talk about you know some good things, but most of the time it's like cool, we can transition without doing it alone, there's somebody to relate to, and at the same point you know it's like we're both in the same classes so now we have study partners." - Peter

The VSO at SJSU aims to spread awareness of active duty and Veteran's issues on campus by organizing community events such as resource fairs, speaker events, recognition ceremonies for Veteran scholarship recipients. Arranging events highlighting topical concerns of active duty and Veterans are another way to improve communication and understanding throughout campus.

However, the VSO is only part of the solution towards creating a welcoming environment. Even those who were aware of the VSO and the services it offers, pointed to why they may not avail of its benefits. Veterans, as is the case with other civilians, look to bond with people who have they have shared experiences with. Lumping all military Veterans, regardless of the branch of service they were part of, or their gender, together will not go far towards recreating the camaraderie they remember from their time in service.

"... for the most part, Veterans feel very uncomfortable around civilians. We can't talk about a lot of things that we can with other people in the military. In addition to that, or going beyond that, there're the microcosms of specifically Army Vets, or specifically Marine Vets. I know that I'm uncomfortable around Marines, whether in or out. They're a little too gung-ho for me. I've met some Navy guys who were actually nervous around me because I was in the Army." - Jacob

Female Veterans are becoming a larger part of the Veteran population in general, as well as of that on campus. Media reports indicate that approximately 11 percent of the military personnel that have been deployed to Iraq and

Afghanistan are women (Baechtold and De Sawal 2009). Female service members in OIF and OEF were exposed to the same dangers and the same stressors as the male service members.

“I’m not used to being set apart from the males being in the military because everyone’s equal. So I can’t say that I can sit in a different place from them.” - Lily

The military, however, is a gendered institution (Acker 1990), and service members are seen as warriors, mostly masculine. Female Veterans feel even less of a connection with their student Veteran peers on campus because of the skewed gender ratio in the military. While in the military, some women negotiate expectations and seek acceptance as a female warrior by minimizing their femaleness (Dunivin 1988), while others may play up their femininity through attire and makeup (Baechtold and De Sawal 2009), and working much harder than their male counterparts in order to prove themselves (Demers 2013).

On separating from the military, renegotiating gender norms and reclaiming suppressed femininity can lead to an inner turmoil that needs a safe space in which to be dealt with. As more female Veterans enroll in college, the campus needs to be aware of the unique needs to this subset of what is already a special population.

“The only difference is that there are less of us, or the ability to reach out and connect with other Veterans. This is the whole male-female dynamic. That’s the only difference. Other than that, I don’t

see that big of a separator. If there were Veterans' programs, I could gravitate towards other females. But I know only one other Veteran." - Edna

The VSO can provide networking opportunities and camaraderie, and having the ability to connect with other female Veterans on campus cannot be over-emphasized. Participants repeatedly expressed the desire to have a student Veterans' lounge. The expectation from such a lounge is that it would be easier to meet and connect with other student Veterans on campus. It would also serve as a supportive environment in which to discuss transition issues with others going through similar experiences.

"And I think it would be nice to have a space for people returning, or in the reserves or whatever, you look at where you can study or even in study groups, or getting to know people. There's really nothing out there at least on campus. I think some of the departments actually have graduate student lounges, or student lounges. Engineering is just such an open free space, I don't know."
- Edna

A place for student Veterans to "hang out" between classes and network with others who share their background and experience would make SJSU a more welcoming campus.

Family, Friends, Students Support-

Deployment to a war zone brings separation from one's family and friends, loneliness, and anxiety over whether one will return from war alive or not. War time experiences such as suffering injuries, or seeing comrades succumb to theirs, are profoundly life changing. The project participants consistently described their family as being their primary source of support before, during, and after deployment. However, for Blue, he felt disconnected from his family after his return from Afghanistan. He said that his mother tried to sympathize with his situation, but he felt like she didn't understand what he was going through since she had not experienced the same extreme situations that he had in the war zone.

"My mom goes "I know what you go through in life," how do you know what I go through in life when you have never been on my level? That's what I have been through." - Blue

Trust is a significant component of a successful relationship. Lily placed a heightened emphasis on not being able to trust those who were not in uniform.

"You can't trust anybody. You feel like you can't trust anybody any more. You almost have to feel like, you wouldn't take a bullet for me, you wouldn't take a bullet for me. I don't know, that's just my mentality." - Lily

Lily found it difficult to trust people in the civilian world to the same degree as she would her military peers. In a war zone, service members are forced to

entrust their lives to their comrades. Given the nature of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with terrorists dressed in civilian clothes, and IEDs (Improvised Explosive Device) placed in civilian transportation, it is understandable that deployed military personnel learn to distrust those who are not in US military uniform. This carries over upon their return and makes trusting civilians a challenge, which can hamper building an effective network for social support on campus.

None of the participants experienced negative interactions with students of non-military background on the SJSU camps. They were concerned that they might be greeted with hostility since it is well known that Vietnam War Veterans were treated in this manner upon their return (Ackerman & DiRamio 2009). Jacob spoke about the hostility he encountered at University of California's Berkeley campus:

“So the Marines, and a number of Vets from the surrounding schools, we all went down there to support the Marines. The hostility coming off the students was amazing. I had never before been called a rapist and a baby-killer to my face before. That just really shot that campus down for me.” - Jacob

This incident was off-putting to Jacob who was considering applying for admission there, but instead dropped that idea, and applied to SJSU instead. Greg talked about being called a “war-monger, baby-raper” in the civilian world, but has encountered no hostility on the SJSU campus. He attributes it to students being better educated among the general civilian population, and to the fact that

there is an ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Course) program on the SJSU campus which makes military personnel a familiar sight on campus.

It is to SJSU students' credit that no hostility was openly expressed towards any of the project participants. Project participants, however, did speak of indifference, ignorance, or disinterest from SJSU students. Only one participant mentioned a significant friendship they formed with a student of non-military background after enrolling at SJSU. Nobody described fellow students as being among their support network.

This feeling of not being understood by family, friends and other students, or struggling with trusting people outside of one's military unit is very isolating. At the same time, it is not just the Veterans who are transitioning, but also their families and close friends who are themselves adjusting to the Veteran's return. All service members are affected in some way by deployment to a war zone (Shen, Arkes, and Pilgrim 2009). Veterans might have returned with physical and behavioral changes which affect their family and friends on multiple levels. A common clinical presentation in distressed couples is a complaint from the non-deployed spouse, "he/she just isn't the same person anymore" (Chapin 2011).

The ability of the Veteran's family and friend to cope with their return, their problem solving and their resilience to all the changes that accompany it, are critical for the successful transition from the military. The US Department of Veterans Affairs has launched a program called "Coaching into Care" which coaches family members to motivate the Veteran to seek services like mental

health counseling in order for them to lead a healthier life. They provide information about services that the Veteran and his or her family can connect with in order to avail of mental or medical health care. They also provide guidance on how family members can communicate with a Veteran who is exhibiting negative behaviors. While there are such national and state level resources available for families, it is of no less importance that SJSU have policies and programs that help them understand the transition issues as their Veteran goes from the military to college life.

Other than health issues, family members of student Veterans face their own challenges. I had an informal phone conversation with the spouse of one of the project participants about the challenges she faced while her husband was a student. Carla said that they struggled with finding a suitable place to live which was conveniently located and affordable. Silicon Valley's current high housing costs combined with recent decreases in funding for affordable housing (Silicon Valley Index 2014) proves a tremendous challenge to student Veterans with young kids, unemployed spouses, and minimal family support. Carla also said that she had to look for a job that offered flexible shifts because they could not afford to pay for childcare on top of other expenses they had while her husband was a student.

Despite these hurdles, Carla acknowledged that going to college had a positive impact on her husband. He was intellectually stimulated, socially engaged, and happy. She also viewed him as her role model in that she was

motivated to finish her degree after he graduated. It was of no small measure of relief that his GI Bill benefits extended to her and would enable her to achieve her dreams of a college education as well.

Carla's only regret was that she was unable to get more involved in her husband's life as a student on the SJSU campus. At home, she helped her husband prepare for tests by making flash cards and discussing what he studied. She spent time on campus walking with him between classes. However, when she tried to volunteer at various events on campus, she was met with a lukewarm response because she wasn't a student enrolled at SJSU. Her observation was that it was very difficult to get involved because volunteering opportunities for non-student spouses were very limited.

In summary, support comes in many forms, but from the perspective of the project participants, it came primarily in the context of forming strong interpersonal relationships with faculty and staff, with other Veterans on campus, with family members, and with fellow students. Involving family and friends who form the primary source of a student Veteran's support system in campus life will go a long way towards making SJSU a Veteran-friendly institution.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

SJSU has already taken concrete steps towards being a Veteran-friendly campus. Allowing the transfer of military credits towards degree requirements, priority registration for student Veterans, creating the “Warriors at Home: Succeeding in College, Life, and Relationships ” class, and the opening of the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) center, which connects student Veterans to VA resources are just a few of the steps in creating a welcoming atmosphere. Additionally, the Burdick Military History Project, Veterans Advisory Committee, and the VSO also publish a newsletter titled “Spartan Salute” that covers activities pertinent to Veterans affairs on campus.

There is little doubt that the country’s colleges and universities play a critical role in ensuring that Veterans have access to high-quality educational experiences which aid in providing a pathway to successful reintegration into civilian life. The US Department of Education has compiled a list, called the “8 Keys to Veterans’ Success”, of specific ways that colleges and universities can support Veterans as they pursue their education and employment goals. This initiative was announced by President Obama at the Disabled American Veterans National Convention, in August of 2013. Since then, 400 colleges and universities across the country have registered and affirmed their commitment to take the necessary steps to assist Veterans and service members in transitioning to higher education (McFarlin 2014).

However, while colleges in the vicinity, such as San Francisco State College, San Jose City College, CSU-Sacramento, have joined in this initiative, SJSU has not yet done so. The goal of this project is to make recommendations specifically for how SJSU can improve the college experience for student Veterans. These recommendations are intended to enable SJSU to provide comprehensive, integrated educational support services to Veterans transitioning to student life by pursuing academic degrees on its campus. In this chapter, therefore, I present these recommendations within the framework of the 8 Keys, but firmly anchored in insights from the interviews conducted with the student Veterans. Presenting them in this manner will also help in an assessment of whether SJSU is a good candidate to register for the 8 Keys initiative.

SJSU has different organizations separated by function- academic, financial, administrative, student affairs, advancement- as well as auxiliary organizations such as Associated Students, each of which holds the power and has the resources to implement the solutions presented. The recommendations clearly identify the organization, or organizations in cases when a collaborative effort is called for, under whose purview each actionable suggestion lies. Figures 2a and 2b diagrammatically present the recommendations grouped together by organization.

It must be stressed that the needs and wants of student Veterans expressed during the interviews should not be considered as a wish list that has to be fulfilled in its entirety by SJSU. Indeed, student Veterans may not benefit

from the implementation of programs to address every single item and the university is under no obligation to check each box in order to be a welcoming campus. To this end, where possible, the recommendations include other programs being carried out on campuses across the country to make the transition seamless. While some of the programs are in their infancy, there is much to be learned from their success or failures. Using the successful programs as a model would make a good starting point in implementing them on the SJSU campus. Programs that have failed would need to be examined to understand their weaknesses and the need and feasibility of altering them to serve the SJSU student Veteran community better.

8 Keys Initiative as applies to SJSU

1. *Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for Veterans.*

Research has shown that when students feel a sense of belonging in a particular class, they feel more confident of accomplishing their academic goals in that class (Freeman et al 2007). Creating a culture of trust begins at the application stages when Veteran status is asked.

“If they’re asking [Veteran status on the application], it’s makes you wonder- Oh I’m a Veteran, they want to know, are they going to put me in touch with [Veteran-specific] resources?” - Edna

“I got a packet [at a different college], I felt really special. But they didn’t offer that at SJSU. That’s more reaching out, instead of me reaching out to find who I had to talk to.” - Lily

The office of Admissions & Outreach provides SJSU information, admission presentations, and represents SJSU in local, regional, and national college fairs. As an extension of the services that they already offer, Admissions & Outreach can lay out the welcome mat to accepted student Veterans even before they show up for campus orientation, by sending a Veteran-specific freshman or transfer-student information kit outlining all the resources available on campus. As expressed by Edna and Lily, sending a welcome kit tailored specifically to Veterans, outlining all the programs and services available at SJSU, along with the acceptance letter paves the way to making Veterans feel wanted at the university.

East Carolina University (ECU) has an extensive Veteran Resource Packet accompanying the general freshman packet, which includes the following information:

- A checklist of admission procedures including how to apply for GI Bill benefits, how to transfer military credits, and how to register for classes
- Location, contact information, and hours of the Student Veterans Services office on campus

- A list of FAQs for Veteran-specific inquiries regarding transferring military credits towards a degree, military transcripts, residency criteria, information on ROTC programs, and GI Bill benefits
- Information on ECU's VSO, mission statement, meeting dates, and contact information
- A list of campus resources including Disability Support, Counseling Center, Military Programs and Outreach, Veterans' Tutoring Center, and the Career Center

Admissions & Outreach should also consider making available a website that replicates all of the information in the paper welcome packet. Additionally, such a website can have personal transition experiences written by student Veterans who are currently enrolled at SJSU, or have successfully graduated. Reading and learning from the experiences of other students with a similar background can offer invaluable insight into the strategies for academic success, and create a connection with the SJSU campus.

A failure to form interpersonal relationships in college is associated with outcomes like depression, anxiety, and attrition or dropping out of college (Tinto 1987). New student Veterans enrolling at SJSU are faced with negotiating new roles in a new academic context. They are separated from their support groups and their former way of life. They may also suffer psychological and physical injuries sustained during their military careers. A service member, especially one that has been deployed to a war zone, has very different, and possibly difficult,

life experiences making them feel isolated and disconnected from friends and family around them who try to empathize. Blue expressed his isolation from family thus,

“My mom goes “I know what you go through in life,” How do you know what I go through in life when you have never been on my level, or what I have been through? I tell them stop trying to talk about things you don’t know about. “ - Blue

Organizing a **support group for families**, friends, and supporters of service members and Veterans could provide valuable tools to foster a more positive environment both on, and off-campus. The 2010 National Survey of Student Engagement found that Veterans reported feeling less supported on campus than non-Veteran students (Lipka 2010). To counter this on their campus, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCL) recognized the need to extend knowledge about, and support of, military students throughout the campus. They did so by establishing the “Green Zone” program (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). Modeled on the “Safe Zone” program for LGBT students, VCL implemented the Green Zone program by training volunteers to work with military students needing assistance, and publicly displaying a logo created specifically for the program, in the offices of the trained volunteers. Surveys done subsequently to evaluate the success of this program uncovered that of those student Veterans that were aware of the program, 70% responded that they knew specific

individuals at VCU to whom they could turn to for help with issues affecting them as a student.

A collaborative effort between the offices of Student Involvement and Faculty Affairs can replicate this model on the SJSU campus by establishing training programs for faculty, staff, and interested military and nonmilitary students who volunteer to participate. Student Involvement's mission is to foster connections within the diverse SJSU community, and prepare students for leadership roles. The office of Faculty Affairs oversees all academic personnel processes for faculty. These organizations can partner to offer training programs for these volunteers, which will give them knowledge of the concerns and issues facing military students, and the resources available to assist them. A logo/sticker visibly identifying these trained volunteers may encourage student Veterans on the SJSU campus to seek them out for discussing issues.

A culture of trust and connectedness on campus is not limited to students and faculty/staff alone. The Office of Counseling Services at SJSU, provides personal and educational counselors to help students improve interpersonal relationships, negotiate life's challenges, and enhance personal development in order to boost academic performance. They are best situated to consider outreach tools such as offering a class for families, friends, supporters and other non-military background students, to spread awareness of Veterans' issues. Citrus College in Glendora, CA has created the "Boots to Books" program to make the service member to student transition easier on its campus. Their

Counseling-160 class is designed to help students create and change their habits and attitude to have a rewarding scholastic experience. In the class, the intellectual, social, and psychological aspects of being a college student are discussed. (Citrus College n.d) The class also introduces learning strategies to enable a confident, enthusiastic and passionate approach to academic life.

Counseling 160 is a Distance Education class, which makes it convenient as well as possible for non-students to take it. The father of a deployed Veteran took the class to prepare for when his son returned (California Teachers Association 2009). Classes like these give insight to the people who make up the students' support network off-campus what student life is like, and prepare them to understand and cope with the challenges faced by their student Veteran who is in college. SJSU could consider implementing a similar class, or offer its existing class "Warriors at Home: Succeeding in College, Life, and Relationships" to non-students as well.

Additionally, student Veterans are older than their college peers, and more likely to have families to support. Juggling school, work, and childcare can become overwhelming without adequate support.

"Specifically [transition challenges with] the school, the daycare list was quite long so after we had our son, my wife had to discontinue schooling because the daycare was so restrictive here. The waiting list was just too long." - Sam

Figure 2a: Actionable Recommendations by Organization

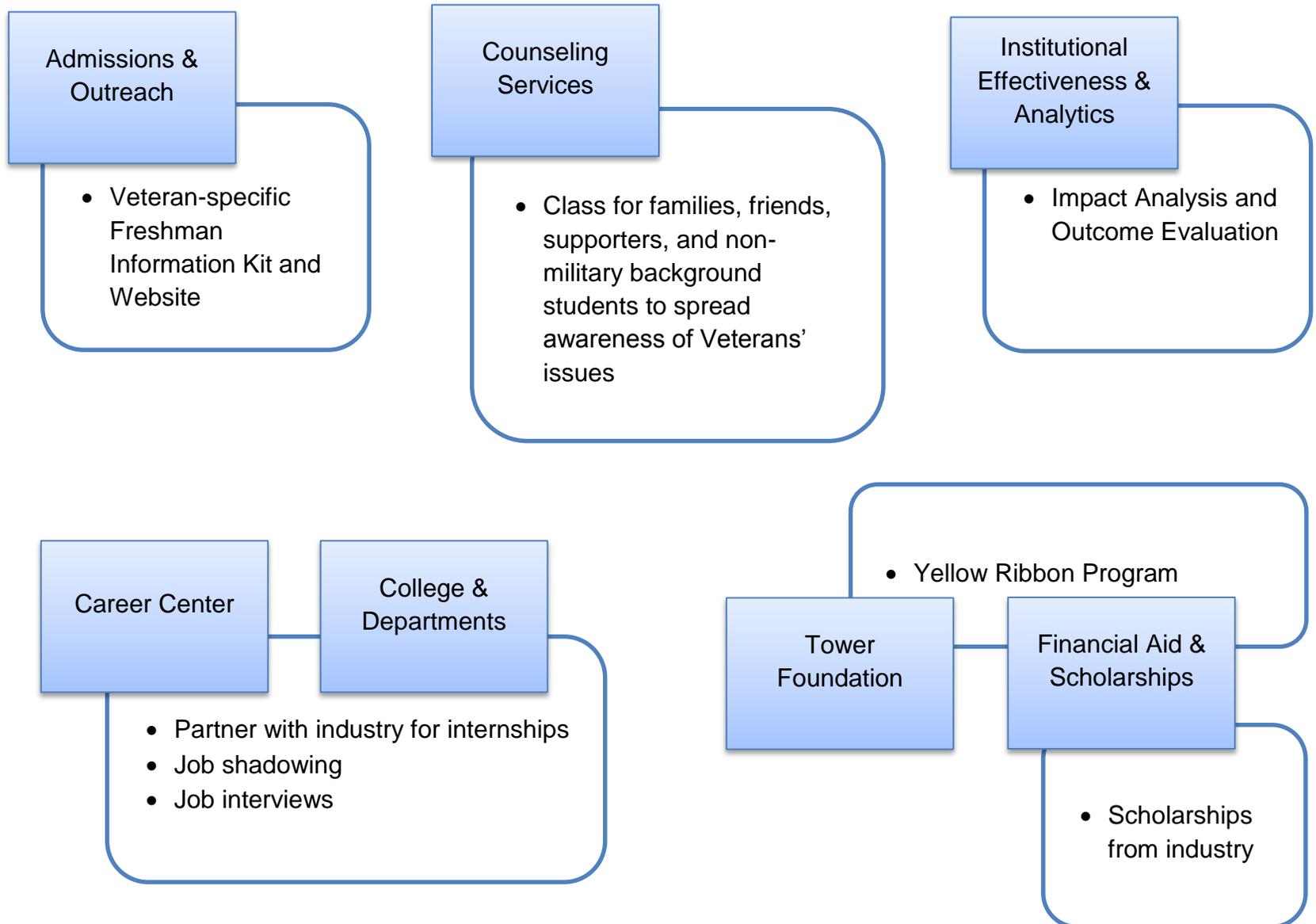
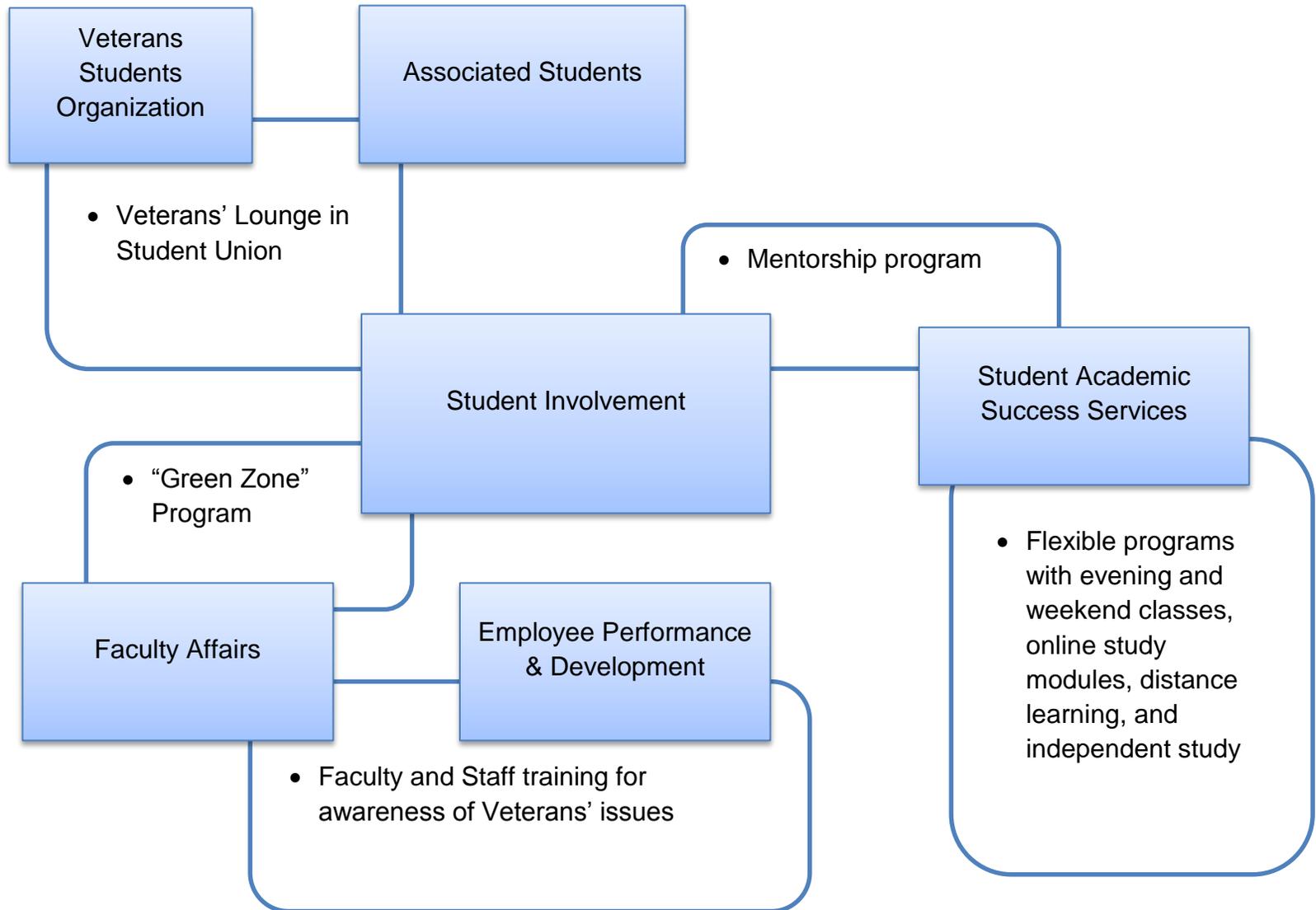


Figure 2b: Actionable Recommendations by Organization



Offering priority placement in the Associated Students' childcare facility also help in conveying that the university cares for their well-being, and lessens the financial stress on students like Sam.

Student Academic Success Services (SASS) should spearhead the effort to offer non-traditional, flexible programs with evening and weekend classes, online study modules, distance learning and independent study. SASS aims to maximize the potential of SJSU students by providing a rich and diverse learning environment, and these flexible options are one way to lower the opportunity cost for students who have career and family commitments.

2. Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership

One avenue of support from campus leadership is in the form of financial assistance. Almost all the project participants were utilizing their Post 9/11 GI Bill educational benefit. Yet, there is a cap to the amount of funds that each individual is entitled to. Veterans who attend public institutions as out-of-state students, or who wish to enroll at private colleges, may need financial assistance beyond their GI Bill entitlement.

“I’m on the Post-9/11 bill and it ends for me next month. After that I’m done. That’s actually, that’s been my huge stress factor right now. I have to figure out how to pay for what I have left to do plus pay for rent, because I live here on campus.” - Greg

In order to aid such students, the Department of Veterans Affairs has created the Yellow Ribbon program. This program allows institutions of higher learning in the US to voluntarily enter into an agreement with the VA to fund tuition and fee expenses that exceed the amount payable under the GI Bill. The VA matches, dollar for dollar, the amount that the school determines to contribute to an individual student's expenses.

SJSU does not currently participate in the Yellow Ribbon program. Among the participants, Edna spoke about being eligible for only a percentage of the tuition at SJSU. Participation in the Yellow Ribbon program, initiated under the aegis of the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarship, in partnership with the Tower Foundation, will help alleviate financial stressors for student Veterans like her.

3. *Implement an early alert system to ensure all Veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming*

A recent Gallup-Purdue University study of college graduates shows that when it comes to being engaged at work and experiencing high well-being after graduation, it matters less what institution a student graduated from, and more the experiences in college. Of the nearly 30,000 college graduates polled, the predictor of strong and consistent progress in one's professional career, was not whether they had attended public or private, highly selective or less selective, large or small institutions. Instead, it was the support and relationships that students experienced in college that led to long term positive outcomes.

Graduates who reported” having professors who cared about them as a person, made them excited about learning, and encouraged them to pursue their dreams” led to being more engaged at work after graduation (Ray and Kafka 2014).

“I’m always keeping professors who have been really instrumental in keeping me focused and keeping me motivated and supported me. I always try to hook up with them a couple of times during the semester and tell them what’s going on and see what kind of information they have. I think I have a good support system here.” -

Matt

A formal mentorship program is a critical way in which to foster relationships between student Veterans and faculty/staff at SJSU. This program can come about through the efforts of SASS, and specifically their Academic Advising & Retention Services (AARS) unit, which has a central role to play in devising strategic initiatives to improve retention and graduation rates, in conjunction with Student Involvement, which has an interest in fostering connections between faculty and students on campus.

The University of California, Irvine has such a program offered through the Veterans Students Organization in place which could be a good template upon which to build SJSU’s mentorship program (University of California n.d). The aim of UCI’s mentorship program is to help student Veterans assimilate back into the academic environment with guidance from a faculty or staff mentor. This program

also aims to help the student establish a personal connection to the campus. Interested faculty and staff go through a training program that teaches them to be effective mentors, and they are highly encouraged to meet with their mentees at least once a quarter.

Formal mentorships serve the purposes of monitoring the progress student Veterans are making, counseling them on academic challenges, and providing them with resources to resolve issues that come up during their time in college. Additionally, it can help identify student Veterans who seem like they might be getting overwhelmed with juggling the challenges of transition with other stressors in their lives, and get them the help they need before there are any disruptions to their academic careers.

4. *Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all Veterans, along with the creation of a designated space for them*

Project participants consistently spoke about the desire to connect with other Veterans on campus, but were unaware of how to initiate such contact easily. Brian was unaware that SJSU offers its student Veterans priority registration. When asked whether he could have found out about this benefit from other student Veterans, his response was that he didn't know any other Veterans on campus. There were other Veteran-specific SJSU services that Brian did not have knowledge of.

"I had no idea that we even have a VSO (Veteran Student Organization) here... Another thing I found out from my good friend

from the Marines was about how Veterans are supposed to get a book stipend. I didn't know that. It's too late now. There's no point in [SJSU] trying to research the last 2.5 years to reimburse me for what books I've used, I probably won't get approved anyway. There're things like that that I didn't know about." – Brian

SJSU has opened a student lounge dedicated to military Veterans, but open to all students, in the newly renovated Student Union. The lounge began operations in Spring 2015. The Student Union provides a variety of services to SJSU's students. It offers recreational activities such as sports, music room, magazines, and a place for students to meet and socialize. It has dining options, information on campus events, and a store selling textbooks, school supplies, and SJSU memorabilia. Having a dedicated space for Veterans in the Student Union will provide opportunities to connect with other students, both Veteran and non-Veteran, and keep abreast with the events on campus.

Associated Students (AS) of SJSU is a student owned and operated organization that works to improve the quality of students' educational opportunities and experiences. AS promotes student advocacy by encouraging students to find voice, share opinions, and express ideas, concerns and needs to the campus. AS, in partnership with the VSO and the Office of Student Involvement can act upon the ensuring that the Veterans' lounge is best serving the needs to all its student Veterans. Among suggestions to make the space more welcoming to Veterans is the need to ensure the areas in and around it are well-lit for student safety, especially for female students. Blind corners can

aggravate the anxiety of Veterans suffering from PTSD, necessitating a space that is open with as few blind corners as possible. The Veterans' lounge should also be able to serve as a facility for SJSU alumni Veterans to drop in if they choose and meet with current students, offer guidance, and answer questions regarding the transition.

The Veteran Student Support Services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has opened its Student Veteran Lounge in their Student Union building, and attests to its location being the biggest draw in providing “a combination of social collaborations, relationships, and other Veteran specific information” (University of Illinois n.d). The lounge contains pamphlets and information specific to Veterans, and provides a space for student Veterans to socialize and study.

5. Collaborate with local communities and organizations to align various services for Veterans

SJSU offers its Veterans on-campus resources such as the career center, counseling center, Accessible Education Center, Veteran's Services Office, and the Veteran's Student Organization. It also collaborates with the VA healthcare system through the VITAL center on campus. Among all these collaborations should be one that creates partnerships between the university and local industry to afford scholarships and internships for student Veterans.

Sam works a full-time job in addition to attending SJSU. He takes additional coursework to learn concepts that he can directly apply on the job. He seeks certification that will help him advance professionally.

“If I have the project management certification in place, then, at least on paper, I’m prepared for the next promotion.” - Sam

James sought admission to a technical program precisely because he thought that SJSU’s location and proximity to technology companies would facilitate his career advancement.

“Being here in Silicon Valley and San Jose is known for their engineering schools and I think it’s definitely one of the reasons why I chose [SJSU] was because it could help me out with getting a job” - James

Student Veterans of America (SVA), is a coalition of student Veterans groups on college campuses that helps Veterans reintegrate into campus life and succeed academically. In November 2012, SVA announced a partnership with Raytheon, a major American defense contractor, to create a scholarship fund to provide financial aid to student Veterans pursuing a science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) degree. These scholarships are open to all student Veterans enrolled at an accredited four-year university in the US. Locally, Cisco Systems has set a precedent in creating industry-university partnerships by generously donating \$5000 to create a scholarship fund for SJSU student Veterans. More such partnerships, channeled through the Office of Financial Aid

& Scholarship, modeled after the Raytheon and Cisco scholarship funds will go a long way in increasing the odds of academic success for student Veterans at SJSU.

The Gallup-Purdue University study also reported that graduates who had the opportunity to work at an internship that allowed them to apply their learning in their chosen field of study also doubled their odds at thriving in all aspects of their well-being (Ray and Kafka 2014). Veterans bring unique skills and perspectives shaped by their life experiences to the job market. They have been trained to lead by example, they know how to instruct, delegate, and motivate team members, they can perform under pressure, and usually have a high work ethic. All these are qualities that should attract prospective employers.

Greater Philadelphia Veterans Network (GPVN) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help connect Veterans and employers in the Philadelphia area. While GPVN mainly caters to unemployed Veterans, it can be tailored to meet the needs of student Veterans. The location of SJSU, and the proximity to employers in many industries- high-tech, defense, pharmaceuticals and biotech, finance, and hospitality services, just to name a few- is advantageous to connecting student Veterans with local internship opportunities.

The Career Center at SJSU could consider opening the dialog with local employers by inviting HR representatives to a campus meet-and-greet session with student Veterans. Each college on the SJSU campus, in the interest of furthering the professional careers of the student Veterans enrolled in their

departments, could leverage the services of the Career Center to explore an arrangement by which participating companies invite student Veterans to shadow assigned company mentors. Prospective employers could then interview with interested and eligible student Veterans for internship positions. A successful partnership between local industry and the student Veteran community at SJSU will benefit successive cohorts of Veterans enrolling at SJSU in their journey to reintegrate into civilian society.

6. *Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on Veterans, including demographics, retention, and degree completion*

SJSU already collects demographic information through the Office of the Registrar on Veterans enrolled at SJSU. Along with a binary outcome of whether the student Veteran graduates or not, a more interesting statistic would be to track how long they take to complete the program. The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), a nonprofit and nongovernmental organization, provides educators and policymakers with accurate longitudinal data on student outcomes to enable informed decision making. Recently, NSC partnered with the SVA and the VA on the Student Veterans of America Million Records Project (MRP). MRP is an ongoing research effort that analyzes graduation rates, time-to-completion, highest degree attained, and degree fields for student Veterans (Cate 2014). Emulating this study locally will shed light on outcomes for the student Veterans at SJSU, and aid in policy making and resource allocation to best serve this

population. SASS is best positioned to assess student success through measurable outcomes, and has the expertise to take this responsibility of gauging student Veterans' academic success under its purview.

7. Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to Veterans

In the preceding chapters, I have covered the challenges that student Veterans may face as they transition from military to college life. These challenges include social isolation, cultural disparities, academic difficulties, mental and physical health issues, anxiety, and depression.

Almost all the interview participants spoke about feeling different from traditional students on campus on account of being older and more mature, having work experience, and benefiting from the opportunity to expand one's worldview through travel during their time in the military. Jacob, an interview participant expressed that he felt "out of place" on campus:

"Usually [my Veteran status is] received with confused interest, like [professors] have no idea how to react to a Veteran. I've had a couple that were actively interested- ok, where did you serve, what did you do? That was very comforting that they were at all interested, even if it was faked interest which honestly I couldn't tell. Very few of them, I can only think of two or three, that looked at me like I had just announced I was in a white-power cult, this kind of disgusted look." - Jacob

On the other hand, Tim spoke about his discomfort with being “put on a pedestal” after he self-identified as a war Veteran:

“Once you’ve identified as a veteran, especially a combat veteran, then you’re in a whole different category than normal people who just go to a 9-to-5 job and haven’t done anything. So they put me on a pedestal and I felt awkward talking about it.” - Tim

A training program for faculty, staff and student Veteran peers will help create an environment for student Veterans to thrive both academically and socially. Training programs could include role-play conversations simulating real-life situations on the campus as well as in the classroom. VITAL, working through the VA hospital system, has already prepared the material for training programs of this nature, and also has facilitators ready to conduct them for the benefit of SJSU faculty and staff. However, these training programs will only come to fruition if perceived as being supported and encouraged by SJSU leadership. The Office of Faculty Affairs, and the Office of Human Affairs, specifically the division of Employee Performance & Development, need to get behind the effort to train and equip faculty, staff, and student peers to assist student Veterans during this time of adjustment and reintegration.

A large scale longitudinal study conducted at 11 institutions of higher learning in eight states in the US surveyed 296 faculty and staff members who were trained in Veterans’ issues through the Veterans on Campus training program offered by the Student Veterans of America (SVA). This study

uncovered that those that went through the training improved their gatekeeper skills: identifying, approaching, and referring students exhibiting signs of psychological distress to appropriate resources; and built military cultural competency skills: understanding common challenges faced by student Veterans, talking with them about their military service, and managing classroom discussions around Veteran-sensitive issues (Albright et al 2013).

Training programs that aim to achieve these results at SJSU will serve to strengthen a supportive environment for its student Veteran population.

8. Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for Veterans

While outside the scope of the current project, this report recommends that any program, policy change, or solution implemented to make the military to college transition smoother must be subjected to rigorous impact analysis and outcome evaluation to measuring its efficacy. This process serves multiple purposes: it demonstrates effectiveness, suggests ways to improve implementation, helps with optimizing limited resources, documents accomplishments and best practices, and justifies current and future funding.

Currently, the responsibility for conducting analyses to monitor students' progress at SJSU lies with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Analytics. They have access to Business Intelligence (BI) tools, and Decision Support (DS) technologies, and the expertise to perform statistical analyses, that could be

leveraged to measure the success and identify areas for further improvement in programs and services targeted at student Veterans' academic success.

Suggestions for future inquiry and action

This project focused on the transition experiences of students who had enrolled and remained in college. Similar studies with Veterans who either dropped out of college, or did not even consider enrolling, post-deployment and post-service will shed light on the barriers this population face in seeking higher education. Studies of this nature will provide a more complete picture of the issues and concerns of Veterans as they consider higher education as a way to reintegrate into civilian life.

Another avenue of research will explore the impact of the programs already in place, or those implemented as a result of the recommendations of this project report. It will be interesting and illuminating to see the results of surveys measuring awareness, as well as utilization rates of implemented solutions to assess efficacy and effect future improvements.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to provide insights into how SJSU supports its student veterans, and make actionable recommendations in areas where it could better meet their needs. Situated within the larger context of understanding the value placed on higher education and the meaning that it carries for Veterans returning from OIF and OEF as they reclaim civilian identity, I demonstrated how the emerging SJSU Veteran identity, the self-identified assets and barriers inform how SJSU can be more welcoming toward Veterans, and support them as they pursue their goals of becoming productive members of society post-military.

I explored several issues relating to the transition from service member to student. Veterans talked about the role that the military played in motivating them to go to college after discharge and how attitudes or skills gained during time in the military are leveraged in academic life; how they think they are similar or dissimilar to the typical SJSU student, and how they believe these perceptions have influenced their university experience. Veterans also discussed how the current educational crisis, which led to tuition increases and impacted classes, affects them. They spoke about the need and desire for support networks that could be relied upon to be successful at college. They talked about the desire for connections with other veterans on campus; and what the barriers to such relationship building are, and the ways by which they can be mitigated.

Reflections

Military cultures are very distinct from campus cultures, and it was inspiring for me to see participants making genuine and determined efforts to transition to the latter. I was also impressed with how generous they were with their time, and with sharing their experiences in the hopes that it would help future cohorts of student Veterans. Throughout the duration of the data collection phase of the project, I kept replaying the interviews in my mind and was struck by the humility of the participants. They had been in tremendously risky situations, and had selflessly fought for the country. Yet, none of them wanted special recognition, or asked for special favors or sympathy beyond reason. The participants collectively also destroyed the stereotype I had in my mind of the conservative, inflexible and arrogant Veteran with an exaggerated sense of entitlement. Each of the participants left a deep impact on me, and I am forever grateful to them for participating in this project. It is my hope that each one of the brave men and women in uniform returning home gets the hero's welcome that they truly deserve.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Instrument

Background Information:

1. Could you tell me your age? What year are you in at this institution? What is your major?
2. Could you tell me how long you served in the military? How many months has it been since discharge?
3. What motivated you to join the military?
Probe: Were educational benefits a factor in influencing your decision to join?
Probe: Have you attended any college before or during deployment(s)?
4. What are your long-term career goals? Are you on your way towards achieving them? What else would you need to know or do to move towards achieving them?

Experience at the Institution:

5. Why did you choose this institution? How do you think this institution can help in achieving your professional and personal goals?
6. Did you have any obstacles in sorting out the paperwork for claiming GI Bill benefits? Did you face any problems in registering for classes you wanted?
Probe: Did you encounter obstacles in getting academic counseling? How did you work through these obstacles?
7. I would like you to reflect on your experiences as a student and a Veteran at this institution. What aspects of it have supported you as a student? What has not been supportive?
Probe: Have you utilized any services provided by the Veteran's service organization on campus?
8. What can the campus do to create a more welcoming and friendly atmosphere for returning Veterans?

Learning Practices:

9. How many units did you take last semester/ or are taking this semester?
How many hours a week would you estimate you spend on preparing for classes?
10. How would you say your training in the military has influenced your expectations as a student?
Probe: How would say your attitude and behavior in the classroom have been shaped by the time in the military? [Prompts: Leadership? Organizational Skills? Discipline? Time-management? Confidence? Stress management?]
11. Have you worked with other students on joint assignments or projects?
Tell me about this experience.
Probe: What did you like about this experience? What did not work for you in this experience? What could have made it better?
12. Think about a class you took here at SJSU that you liked. What about the class did you like?
Prompts: Instructor? Style of instruction? Level of structure provided? Course material? Projects or assignments? Level of challenge that class presented? Camaraderie with classmates?
13. Now think about a class that you took here at SJSU that you did NOT like.
What about the class did you NOT like?
14. What do you think is your most effective strategy in learning new material?
What is the best way in which information can be presented for you to remember it?
Prompt: Visually through pictures, videos, graphs? By listening? By reading? Through discussion with other people? Through hands-on activities?
15. What is the easiest way for you to demonstrate what you have learned?
How do you prefer to express yourself?

Prompt: Through writing? Orally? Class presentation? Making a video?

Probe: What is your usual level of participation in class? Are you comfortable with public speaking?

16. How do you use technological devices in classes [laptops, computers, projectors, smart phones, cameras] in any of your classes? What are the benefits of using technology for learning? What are the challenges of using technology for learning?

Probe: Have you used technology in the military that you think would be useful in the classroom?

17. Think of the professors and instructors you have had. What have they done that you would consider was welcoming to you? What have they done that was less welcoming? What could they have done better?

18. I would like to give you a hypothetical assignment and ask you to comment on it. Imagine you are in a class in which you are asked to

- a. Track the effects of the economy on the demographics of Santa Clara county.
- b. Evaluate a health care program for newly arrived refugees without health insurance.
- c. Analyze the usage patterns of public transportation in the Bay Area.
- d. Report on the benefits and risks of online social networking.

What would you like about this assignment? What parts do you find challenging? How would you change the assignment to make it fit your learning style better?

Identity Navigation:

19. Think about the students at your institution. What do you have in common with those students? What do you think makes you different from those students?

Probe: How does being a Veteran give you common ground or make you distinct?

Probe: How does being a man (or woman), like yourself, make a difference? How do you think being a man (or woman) Veteran student would make a difference?

20. Think about your role as a soldier/marine. How was that different from your role as a student?

Probe: If you were a student before deployment, how would you say your attitude and experience as a student now is different from before?

21. Do you think that you are treated any differently by faculty and other students because of your military background?

22. What would you say the difficulties are in transitioning from the military to student life?

Support Networks:

23. Do you receive adequate support from faculty and fellow students?

Probe: Have you discussed your career and personal goals with either faculty members or administrators?

Probe: What role do other Veterans on campus play in your life? Can you tell me of a time when other Veterans played a role that mattered to you.

24. Have you attended office hours seeking help with coursework from your professors? Do you approach faculty or fellow students with questions about class material?

25. How do you handle constructive criticism and feedback from your professors on your course work?

26. How do handle the pressures of course load, exams, term papers and so on?

27. Other than college, are there any activities you participate in towards achieving your career and personal goals?

28. Tell me about your family and friends? What obligations do you have to them? Probe: Do you have other commitments besides college that you need to devote your time to?

Probe: What do you like to do with your friends and family?

29. How do they support your career and personal goals? What do they do that does not support these goals? What could they do to be more supportive?

Other:

30. If a fellow Veteran were to ask you what the benefits of college were, what would you say?

31. If a fellow Veteran were to ask you what the biggest challenges of college were, what would you say?

32. Can you think of fellow Veterans who ARE enrolled in college and would like to participate and be interviewed for this study?

33. Can you think of fellow Veterans who ARE NOT enrolled in college and would like to participate and be interviewed for this study?

APPENDIX B: Request for Participants

Request for participants for study by the Anthropology Department at SJSU

Would you like to help your fellow OIF/OEF Veterans successfully transition from combat to campus?

The Department of Anthropology at San Jose State University is conducting a study to understand the challenges that combat Veterans face at institutions of higher learning. This study is the first step towards determining solutions to address these challenges. We are looking for OIF/OEF Veterans willing to be interviewed about their experiences with higher education. Volunteers will participate in one-on-one interviews with a student researcher. Your participation will be confidential and no identifying information will be released as part of this or future studies.

To be eligible, you need to have previously finished at least 1 semester/quarter of college and be currently enrolled at a college in the Bay Area. There is no compensation to participate in this study.

If you are interested in participating or have more questions, please contact Varsha Damle at xxx@yyy.com or at 408-xxx-yyyy.

APPENDIX C: Executive Summary of Report to SJSU Stakeholders

A Hero's Welcome: Enabling a smoother transition from war zone to SJSU for OIF/OEF Veterans

The purpose of this study, a project for the Applied Anthropology Master's degree program, is to explore the experiences of student Veterans enrolled at San Jose State University to identify areas where the university could better effect a richer academic environment and drive higher retention and graduation rates among this student population. This project is situated within the larger context of understanding the value placed on higher education and the meaning that it carries for Veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) as they reclaim civilian identity. The emerging SJSU student Veteran identity, and the self-identified assets and barriers inform how SJSU can be more welcoming toward Veterans, and support them as they pursue their goals of becoming productive members of society post-military.

Looking through an anthropological lens, this qualitative study takes the approach of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to closely examine how academic life at is understood and experienced by a group of 13 OIF/OEF student Veterans enrolled in higher education who were interviewed between late spring to early summer of 2011. The IPA approach is idiographic in nature, and in this case is used to uncover the perceptions and understandings of this group of

student Veterans as they transition from service member to student on the SJSU campus.

Recommendations are presented in accordance with the 8 Keys to Veterans' Success, an initiative developed by the Department of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and championed by the Obama Administration that outline eight concrete steps that institutions of higher education can take to help Veterans transition into the classroom and thrive in an academic environment. Within this framework, recommendations anchored in insights from the interviews conducted with the student Veterans highlight the following specific ways that SJSU can support its student Veterans as they pursue their educational and employment goals:

1. Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success: Creating a culture of trust begins at the application stages when Veteran status is asked.

"If they're asking [Veteran status on the application], it's makes you wonder- Oh I'm a Veteran, they want to know, are they going to put me in touch with [Veteran-specific] resources?" - Edna, spent 7 years as an US Army officer

"I got a packet [at a different college], I felt really special. But they didn't offer that at SJSU. That's more reaching out, instead of me reaching out to find who I had to talk to." - Lily, spent 8 years in the US Army

As expressed by Edna and Lily, sending a **welcome kit tailored specifically to Veterans**, outlining all the programs and services available at SJSU, along with the acceptance letter paves the way to making Veterans feel wanted at the university.

A service member, especially one that has been deployed to a war zone, has very different, and possibly difficult, life experiences making them feel isolated and disconnected from friends and family around them who try to empathize.

“My mom goes “I know what you go through in life,” How do you know what I go through in life when you have never been on my level, or what I have been through? I tell them stop trying to talk about things you don’t know about. “
- Blue, spent 4 years in the US Army

Organizing a **support group for families**, friends, and supporters of service members and Veterans could provide valuable tools to foster a more positive environment both on, and off-campus.

Student Veterans are older than their traditional student peers. They are likely to be supporting a spouse and children. Juggling school, work, and childcare can become overwhelming without adequate support.

“Specifically [transition challenges with] the school, the daycare list was quite long so after we had our son, my wife had to discontinue schooling because the daycare was so restrictive here. The waiting list was just too long.” - Sam, spent 5 years in the US Marine Corps

Offering **priority placement in the Associated Students’ childcare** facility also help in conveying that the university cares for their well-being, and lessens the financial stress on students like Sam.

2. Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership:

Participation in the **Yellow Ribbon** program will ease the financial burden of attending college.

“I’m on the Post-9/11 bill and it ends for me next month. After that I’m done. That’s actually, that’s been my huge stress factor right now. I have to figure out how to pay for what I have left to do plus pay for rent, because I live here on campus.” - Greg, spent 4 years in the US Army

3. Implement an early alert system to ensure all Veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming: **Formal peer and faculty mentorship programs** contribute to student success and long term positive outcomes.

"I'm always keeping professors who have been really instrumental in keeping me focused and keeping me motivated and supported me. I always try to hook up with them a couple of times during the semester and tell them what's going on and see what kind of information they have. I think I have a good support system here." - Matt, spent 4 years in the US Army

4. Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all Veterans, together with the creation of a designated space for them: Brian was unaware that SJSU offers its student Veterans priority registration. When asked whether he could have found out about this benefit from other student Veterans, his response was that he didn't know any other Veterans on campus. There were other Veteran-specific SJSU services that Brian did not have knowledge of.

"I had no idea that we even have a VSO (Veteran Student Organization) here... Another thing I found out from my good friend from the Marines was about how Veterans are supposed to get a book stipend. I didn't know that. It's too late now. There's no point in [SJSU] trying to research the last 2.5 years to reimburse me for what books I've used, I probably won't get approved anyway. There're things like that that I didn't know about." - Brian, spent 4 years in the US Army

A **dedicated space for Veterans** in the Student Union will provide opportunities to connect with other students on campus and keep abreast of event on campus.

A **Veterans Resource Center** to house all support services will serve as a centralized location that offers guidance and resources for help.

5. Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for Veterans: Sam works a full-time job in addition to attending SJSU. He takes additional coursework to learn concepts that he can directly apply on the job. He seeks certification that will help him advance professionally.

“If I have the project management certification in place, then, at least on paper, I’m prepared for the next promotion.”- Sam, spent 5 years in the US Marine Corps

James sought admission to a technical program precisely because he thought that SJSU’s location and proximity to technology companies would facilitate his career advancement.

“Being here in Silicon Valley and San Jose is known for their engineering schools and I think it’s definitely one of the reasons why I chose [SJSU] was because it could help me out with getting a job” - James, spent 6 years in the US Navy

Other student Veterans who are at school full-time without the opportunity to apply their learnings on the job will benefit from partnerships between SJSU and local industry to afford scholarships and **internships**. These will provide opportunities for applying learning in real life situations and be stepping stones to a fulfilling professional career.

6. Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention, and degree completion: **Tracking data** on graduation rates, time-to-completion, highest degree attained, degree fields, job placement upon nearing and after graduation will aid in policy making and resource allocation to continually improve efforts targeted at Veteran success.

7. Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to Veterans: Almost all the interview participants spoke about feeling different from traditional students on campus on account of being older and more mature, having work experience, and benefiting from the opportunity to expand one's worldview through travel during their time in the military. Jacob, an interview participant expressed that he felt "out of place" on campus:

"Usually [my Veteran status is] received with confused interest, like [professors] have no idea how to react to a Veteran. I've had a couple that were actively interested- ok, where did you serve, what did you do? That was

very comforting that they were at all interested, even if it was faked interest which honestly I couldn't tell. Very few of them, I can only think of two or three, that looked at me like I had just announced I was in a white-power cult, this kind of disgusted look.” - Jacob, spent 4 years in the US Army

On the other hand, Tim spoke about his discomfort with being “put on a pedestal” after he self-identified as a war Veteran:

“Once you’ve identified as a veteran, especially a combat veteran, then you’re in a whole different category than normal people who just go to a 9-to-5 job and haven’t done anything. So they put me on a pedestal and I felt awkward talking about it.” - Tim, spent 5 years in the US Navy

Akin to a “safe zone” program, establishing a “green zone” program by **training** all new faculty and interested faculty, staff and students **on military and Veteran culture and challenges** will help ease the transition to college life.

8. Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for Veterans: Accountability will hinge on **rigorous impact analyses and outcome evaluations** to measure the efficacy of any Veteran-centric program or service.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ The highest ranks in government, royalty, religion- such as President, Queen, Prophet- are often capitalized to confer respect. I capitalize the word Veteran throughout this document as a mark of respect for the bravery and selflessness that men and women in uniform demonstrate when they fight wars to protect the country and defend its freedoms. It is my contribution towards recognizing the sacrifices they make, and thanking them for their service.

ⁱⁱ San Jose State University has a diverse student body spanning from those that enroll right after high school to working professionals who go back to school to upgrade their credentials, but the average age of undergraduates is 23 years. The average age of undergraduates that participated in this study was higher at 28.

ⁱⁱⁱThe names of all participants are pseudonyms. Blue picked his own pseudonym when informed that all identifying information would be masked.