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# Veterans Education: Coming Home to the Community College Classroom

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NATIONAL-LOUIS UNIVERSITY

VETERANS EDUCATION: COMING HOME TO THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
CLASSROOM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

In

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

BY

KAREN RAE PERSKY

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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## DEDICATION

“We cannot direct the wind but we can adjust the sails.” ~Author Unknown

To my mother Diane E. Asche and late father Harlan E. Asche who provided the foundation for me to be a life long learner and to my husband Bruce who supported me throughout this research. To my children, Jacob Persky, David Persky, Julie Scott, and Christina Persky.

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My deepest appreciation is reserved for the case institution and participants who generously gave their time and efforts to this research.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs. A qualitative case study design using interviews, observations, field notes, document reviews, a focus group, and a preinterview demographic questionnaire provides a holistic account of the community college experience for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. This research study gives a voice to veterans who are community college students, and provides community colleges with insights that may enable them to improve their services for this population.

Five major themes relating to the veterans' perspectives of their needs at the case institution emerged from the data: (a) credit streamlining; (b) streamlining of programs and services; (c) faculty, advisor, and counselor training; (d) difficulties encountered by veterans, and (e) factors that constitute a veteran friendly campus. These five themes are linked and presented in an integrated way in order to holistically address the study's three research questions. What do veterans perceive their needs to be at the community college? What programs and services are currently in place at the community college to address the needs of veterans? What recommendations can be made for improving the veterans' community college experience? This study adds to the body of knowledge and potentially contributes to a future blueprint for the successful education of veterans who are community college students.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ACE    | American Council on Education                                 |
| CCAF   | Community College of the Air Force                            |
| DANTES | Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support         |
| ESL    | English as a Second Language                                  |
| IVG    | Illinois Veterans Grant                                       |
| MDRC   | Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation                   |
| MGIB   | Montgomery GI Bill  |
| PRIDE  | Personal Rehabilitation, Individual Development and Education |
| PTSD   | Post Traumatic Stress Disorder                                |
| SOC    | Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges                           |
| SVA    | Student Veterans Association                                  |
| TBI    | Traumatic Brain Injury  |
| VA     | Veterans' Administration                                      |
| VCO    | Veterans' Certifying Official                                 |
| VSO    | Veterans' Service Officer                                     |
| WAVE   | Web Automated Verification Enrollment                         |

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Study

Two significant factors contributing to the post World War Two (WWII) American economic standard of living have been the Government Issue (GI) Bill of Rights and the community college, both of which afforded educational opportunity for the masses. Historians credit the educational achievements and resulting increased earning capacity of veterans to the GI Bill of Rights (Greenberg, 1997). According to Webb and Hagel (2007), the GI Bill of Rights, officially titled the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, provided for the education of eight million veterans within a seven year time period after the bill was signed into law. The GI Bill, in company with the community college concept of open access to education has been a powerful driving force of our nation's prosperity since the middle of the twentieth century.

The community college embodies the American ideal of opportunity and serves as a pathway for those who desire to climb the ladder of success. The notion of education as the conduit for an individual to "rise" is not new. Education as the way to upward mobility was a concept given extensive visibility in the late 1800's by Andrew Carnegie, who argued for the construction of "ladders upon which the aspiring can rise" (Kirkland, 1962, p. 28). Even later in 1974, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education viewed community colleges as institutions of open access which serve a democratizing role (Baily & Morest, 2006; Townsend & Bragg, 2006). Educational opportunity was the fruit of the GI Bill of Rights and the community college.

Responsiveness to changing demographics and shifting community needs are inherent in the community college context. With the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, American community colleges can expect a major change on the horizon as an increasing number of students who are veterans join the colleges' diverse student bodies (Lederman, 2008a; Lederman, 2008b). Approximately half of all post secondary students in the United States are enrolled in two year learning institutions (AACC, 2008; Guess, 2008). There are 450,000 veterans using their G.I. Bill benefits for education, and approximately 40% of them attend community colleges (Alvarez, 2008). Therefore, community colleges can expect to absorb a substantial number of veterans as they seek post secondary education after serving in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Community colleges, as they persevere in their mission of service to the community, need to reach out to these veterans by providing a framework of support.

Several converging circumstances make it urgent for community colleges to understand and address the needs of this student population. The new, much improved GI Bill that was recently signed into law will provide new federal resources to help veterans pay for college (Bush, 2008; Davenport, 2008; Redden, 2008a; Redden, 2008b; Wiedeman, 2008). Because returning veterans have had a different life experience than many of their classroom contemporaries, community colleges will need appropriate student services to handle the large numbers who will likely make use of these funds. Also, at the current time, community colleges are dealing with other "pockets" of growing enrollment. For example, trends show that the "Baby Boomer" population is returning to the community college in pursuit of skills for second careers (Palazesi &

Bower, 2006). Moreover, recession-fueled job losses reported by the widely circulated Reuters Report (“Bleak Outlooks,” 2008) and rising tuition rates at public universities (Kelly, 2005) are prompting enrollment increases.

Community colleges must balance the needs of these “new” and growing enrollment bases in concert with an influx of veterans. However, supporting additional student populations is challenging in light of a struggling national economy. Budget reductions in most states are expected to continue for the next few years (National Governor’s Association, 2009). The economic downturn and cuts in state support by the Illinois governor (Ford, 2008) will continue to have an impact on higher education and call for community colleges to be more efficient than ever in serving their enrollment segments, especially those with particular needs, such as veterans. Moreover, the economic recession that began in 2007 has stimulated an increase in full time student enrollment in the nation’s community colleges (AACCC Policy, 2009).

It is in the interest of the community colleges to be prepared for the recruitment and retention of veteran students, as these students represent a large cohort of potential enrollees for the institution (Field, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Lewis & Sokolow, 2008; Palm, 2008; Pulley, 2008; Sachs, 2008). A military-friendly and supportive campus is a winning situation for the veterans, active duty students, and the institutions (Lederman, 2008a). As stated by Byman (2007), “Veterans enrich the classroom. Soldiers’ experiences in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere give them firsthand insight into the questions that are at the heart of a modern university education” (¶ 3). Veterans contribute to learning within the community college classrooms in this same way.

It is important that community colleges understand the needs of veterans, and the veterans to likewise know how to navigate their way through the institution. Just as America welcomed home the veterans from WWII with educational opportunity, it is advantageous for the community college to be prepared for an influx of the nation's Iraq and Afghanistan veterans into the educational system. The GI Bill experience of WWII showcased the power of investing in the education of individuals. The nation's veterans, who have risked their lives, represent a disciplined and motivated group of students who are deserving of the educational opportunities found at community colleges. With a good educational foundation, current veterans can rise to the height of previously educated war veterans whose positive contributions continue to impact the socioeconomic well being of the country. This study sought to gain insights that could assist community colleges in understanding the concerns and perspectives of students who are veterans, and to better address their specific needs.

#### Purpose and Research Questions of the Study

The purpose of the research study was to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs. Three research questions guided the study:

1. What do veterans perceive their needs to be at the community college?
2. What programs and services are currently in place at the community college to address the needs of veterans?
3. What recommendations can be made for improving the veterans' community college experience?

### Significance of the Study

The study, which probed the perspectives and recommendations of community college faculty, administrators, staff, and students who are veterans presents a holistic account of the community college experience for veterans, and particularly veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. This research adds to the body of knowledge and potentially contributes to a future blueprint for the successful education of these students. Thus the significance of the study is that the research gives a voice to veterans who are community college students, as well as providing community colleges with insights that may enable them to improve their services for this population.

Because the body of research on the education of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans is limited, the study is timely and important to higher education. The current published information on veterans and education is limited to newspaper and brief journal articles. No interpretive studies with thick descriptive data were found in the current literature on the education of veteran students in community college settings. Finally, the study provides a framework for examining veterans' concerns as they attempt reentry into the civilian world via education.

The importance of this study also lies in its ability to juxtapose the needs of veterans with the mission of service the community college represents to its constituents. As more research is focused on the education of veterans and as colleges respond to veterans in unique and compelling ways then gateways for promising practices will open. Therefore, the insights gained from this research provide a step in the staircase leading to

an understanding of recently returning veterans and their needs when they seek to rejoin American civilian society as educated, fulfilled, and contributing members.

### Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Two theories and two concepts were used to frame the study: (a) Human Capital Theory (HCT) of Education, (b) Rendon's theory of validation, (c) globalization, and (d) holistic spirituality. HCT, recognizing human knowledge as intellectual capital, contributes to humanity when integrated with the conceptual frameworks of globalization and holistic spirituality. Education is an essential part of globalization that embraces the market economy (Spring, 1998), thus education of the populace is critical to the economic well being of the nation. Moreover, Tisdell's (2003) seven components of spirituality are similar to Friedman's (2006) curiosity (CQ) and passion quotients (PQ), which he argues are more important than the intelligence quotient (IQ) in the *flat* world of instantaneously processed information. Also, spirituality can be seen as an inspirational element for Rendon's theory of validation, as it creates an awareness of each person's promising potential that is requisite for validation.

### Definition of Terms

*Active duty military.* A person who is serving in a military force during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and is currently designated by the military as being in an "active duty" status.

*Administrators.* Community college employees who are presidents, vice presidents, deans, or associate deans.

*Cohort.* A model designed by John Schupp (2009) of Cleveland State University where veterans have an opportunity to experience their education as a learning community for one or two semesters.

*Illinois Veterans' Grant.* A tuition payment program for veterans who meet three criteria: (a) have resided in Illinois six months before matriculation in the armed forces, (b) had one year of active duty service in the armed forces, and (c) have returned home to Illinois within six months of discharge (Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009).

*Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.* A nonprofit social policy research organization whose purpose is to increase academic achievement of young adults (Manpower Demonstration, 2010).

*Post 9/11 GI Bill.* Effective August 1, 2001, individuals who have received an honorable discharge from the armed forces and have at least 90 days of aggregate service, or discharged with a service connected disability after 30 days since September 11, 2001 are entitled to financial support for education and housing. Tuition payment is based upon the highest in-state tuition (United States, 2009).

*Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges.* An organization dedicated to helping members of the armed forces and their families participate in higher education with the goal of obtaining a college degree (Servicemembers, 2008).

*Veteran.* A person who has served in the armed forces, particularly in the Iraq or Afghanistan theaters and is eligible to receive GI Bill benefits.

*Veterans' Certifying Official.* A college employee whose positional responsibility is to provide students who are veterans with benefit counseling, an interpretation of institutional and VA policies, military transcript evaluation, and advising services.

*Veterans' Services Officer.* An employee of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, which is a state agency that connects veterans and their families to programs and services for veterans.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 presented an overview of the study which included the (a) background, purpose, research questions, and significance, (b) theoretical and conceptual frameworks utilized, and (c) definition of terms. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature that contextualizes the study of veterans' education. Chapter 3 explains the methodology, methods, and data analysis procedures used to study veterans' education at the case institution. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study by answering the research questions and addressing the purpose of the study. The five major themes that emerged from the data during the analysis process are linked and presented in an integrated way in order to holistically understand the responses to the research questions. Chapter 5 provides recommendations for practice, a discussion of the findings using four theoretical and conceptual lenses, and conclusions drawn from the study. This chapter also provides insights into the study's implications for community colleges regarding the education of veterans, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Because the purpose of the study is to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs, it is important to situate the research in a historical context. This chapter provides background and context that serve to (a) examine why community colleges should care about veterans in a historical sense, (b) explore ways higher education has previously responded to the needs of disenfranchised student groups that might be applicable to the veteran population of students, (c) report the unique and compelling ways higher education is currently addressing the issue of veterans' education, and (d) examine some of the obstacles to veterans' education. This chapter also discusses the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used for the research study: Human Capital Theory of Education, Rendon's theory, globalization, and spirituality.

#### Historical Perspective

In order to comprehend the political, ideological, and economic reasons for supporting or not supporting veterans' educational benefits, it is important to contextualize each period of time in their evolution. The swinging pendulum for or against veterans' benefits is a part of American history.

#### *Pre World War One*

The initial position taken by Thomas Jefferson can be seen as historical ground zero for veterans' benefits in the U.S. According to historian John Resch (1999), the founding fathers viewed provisional benefits that had been proposed for nondisabled

veterans as damaging to the moral fabric of American society. However, by Jefferson's second presidential term moral sentiment changed. In his book *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiments, and Political Culture in the Early Republic*, Resch describes the 1818 Revolutionary War Pension Act as a response to a rising quid pro quo sentiment.

Regular soldiers and the people were made one. Moreover, Continental Army veterans became symbols of patriotism and archetypes of national character. The public viewed them as benefactors owed a debt of gratitude by a grateful nation. In awarding pensions, a new generation reversed the Founders' creed that rewarding benefactors promoted moral declension and social privilege by creating placemen who subverted civic virtue. So strong was the new generation's conviction to memorialize and reward veterans with pensions, that the program survived a national scandal caused by corruption and high cost. It withstood congressional challenges to its constitutionality. It survived sectional conflict caused by resentment arising from the northeastern states receiving most of the benefits. (Resch, p. 5)

Furthermore, compensation for veterans under the 1818 Revolutionary War Pension Act contributed to later controversies surrounding benefits (Resch, 1988). Documents from the The National Archives (n.d.) reveal that veterans were the first to receive recompense in the form of land grants with special residency requirements. The Homestead Act of 1862, which was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln, adjusted the residency condition for land grants to accommodate veterans (The National Archives, n.d.). By the end of the Civil War, not only were Union soldiers privy to land grants, federal employment, and pensions, but disabled veterans were additionally privileged to receive medical care (Boulton, 2005). Both strokes of the pen had transformed the social status of veterans. Boulton boldly states that by 1924, during the Coolidge presidency, "The Minuteman was at risk of becoming a Hessian mercenary" (p.

23). The perspective of what was expected and owed to a war veteran had most certainly undergone a historical metamorphosis that would continue to the present.

#### *World War One*

The nation is obligated to remember a history lesson from World War One (WWI)—unhappy and underappreciated veterans are fuel for societal uprisings. Historian Milton Greenberg (1997) tells of the day when United States veteran soldiers, at the foot of Capitol Hill, were fired upon by the U.S. Army at the *Bonus March Camping Ground* in 1932. In the 1997 television broadcast “The GI Bill,” Cliff Robertson narrates the story of active duty soldiers who, under the command of General MacArthur, Major Eisenhower, and Major Patton, attacked protesting veterans (Thomas, 1997). Veteran soldiers, who only wanted what was promised to them by their country, were essentially looking for validation. The result of post WWI veterans’ treatment in the U.S. would drastically change government management of veterans’ benefits, including its view of education (Greenberg, 1997). Superficially it might appear that the post World War Two (WWII) GI Bill of Rights was signed because of altruism, but according to history scholars, it was signed for another more compelling reason.

#### *World War Two*

History reveals that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) clearly understood the necessity of providing a welcoming atmosphere to the returning soldiers, sailors, and marines. During his July 28 fireside chat, Roosevelt (1943) told the American people “Veterans must not be demobilized into an environment of inflation and unemployment, to a place on a bread line or on a corner selling apples. We must this time

have plans ready” (¶ 43). FDR wanted to avoid a situation that would result in the return of 16 million unhappy and underappreciated men and women from military service in WWII. Not only did the GI Bill of Rights, drafted and advocated by the American Legion, circumvent the anticipated breadlines, corner apple stands, and bonus marches that could have occurred (Thomas, 1997), it became the trigger for an educational explosion that would nudge the young community college concept toward its current number of 1,600 community colleges and branch campuses in the nation.

AACC (n.d.) describes the GI Bill passage as one of the turning points in the advancement of public community colleges:

The GI Bill was a milestone in the federal funding for education of individuals and did much to break down the economic and social barriers to allow millions of Americans to attend college. Indeed, more than 2.2 million veterans, including more than 60,000 women and approximately 70,000 blacks, attended college under the GI Bill. (¶ 9)

The 1944 G.I. Bill provided a stipend of \$500 a year for tuition, books, and fees, as well as a \$50 to \$75 per month, or more allowance based on the number of dependents a veteran had. This was enough to enable veterans to attend the most prestigious universities at a time when Harvard tuition was \$450 per year (Camire, 2008).

### *Vietnam War*

Since the Vietnam War, there has been a pervasive silence on the study of war (Gandal, 2008). In his article, “Don’t be Afraid to Study War” Keith Gandal, professor of English at Northern Illinois University and author of the book *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner and the Fiction of Mobilization* laments the paucity of literary and cultural works about war in the past two and a half decades. “Since the

Vietnam era—and this marks a break with previous attitudes – most American intellectual elites have not wanted to be in the military or to study it. . . . After all, much American war literature is antiwar or anti-military or both” (Gandal, 2008, ¶ 5).

Vietnam veterans did not fare as well as those from WWII when they came home to an ungrateful nation (Pillari, 2007). The Vietnam veterans received about 50% less in relative benefits than WWII veterans, thus forcing them to work while they attended college (Horan 1992). Horan contends that “post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Vietnam veterans was linked with college underachievement” (Abstract ¶ 1). However, Boulton (2005) presents in his historical research study entitled “A Price on Freedom: The Problems and Promise of the Vietnam Era G.I. Bills,” a different perspective on the reasons and political nuances that led to the misunderstandings and misinformation of the Vietnam era G.I. Bill. His perspective is helpful in situating the current state of veterans’ education historically. For example, in Boulton’s view, the reasons that the post 1944 G. I. Bill revisions were underappreciated were (a) the overall negativity of the Vietnam War and (b) the lack of scholarly research. Boulton exposes and helps to rectify the lack of scholarly work on the Vietnam era G.I. Bill with his in-depth examination of the political, economic, and ideological climate at each attempt to upgrade or downgrade the original 1944 version of the Bill. His research provides a historical perspective with which to frame post 9/11 veterans’ education. However, college student achievement or underachievement was not the focus of the Boulton’s study.

Boulton’s (2005) research sets a foundation for future interest and studies in the arena of veterans’ education and provides the shoulders on which future research can

stand within the context of the current Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. It also provides a historical context in which to argue that the nation needs to be prepared for the influx of veterans. The value of Boulton's research lies in its ability to readjust the American perception of the Vietnam veterans' educational achievements, as it debunks the stereotypical "emotionally and physically crippled [Vietnam veteran]" (p. 9). Thus the perception of an American war veteran as being less than capable is shown to be inaccurate and does a disservice to the veteran who seeks an education.

#### *Post Vietnam War to the Present*

The post WWII GI Bill had not kept pace with the cost of college tuition (Diament, 2007; Camire, 2008; "What the G.I.'s Deserve," 2008) and as a result, veterans who were seeking an education were placed in a position of frustration when tuition exceeded their means for payment. However, according to U.S. Senator and former Secretary of the Navy James Webb, the "Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act," that he introduced and was subsequently signed into law by President Bush on June 30, 2008, will afford "the same opportunity for a first class educational future as those who served during World War II" ("Webb GI Bill", 2008, ¶ 4). The Webb version of the G.I. Bill provides an opportunity for veterans to choose a more expensive private education, as the government would match the monetary support that a private school was willing to invest (Camire, 2008). Educational benefits for veterans have increased by \$221, to \$1,321 per month (Alvarez, 2008), thus eliminating most educational cost issues for veterans.

However, navigating the new bill's implementation and usage can be problematic (Redden, 2008b). Redden (2008c) reports from her interview with Career College Association President Harris N. Miller that with only 7% of veterans making use of all their benefits, it can be inferred that the complexity of educational benefits will be almost insurmountable for many veterans. Interestingly, executive opposition to the Webb version of the bill was rooted in fear that increasing educational benefits would be a disincentive for staying in the military, thereby draining the military of its members (Camire, 2008). Counter to the Bush administration's perspective, Webb argued that the increase in educational benefits would act as an attractant for recruits who were in need of financial assistance to get a higher education (Camire, 2008). Showing the importance of improving educational benefits to the level of those received by WWII veterans, Webb (2008) argues recompense for the years served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars:

I see the educational benefits in this bill as crucial to a service member's readjustment to civilian life and as a cost of war that should receive the same priority that funding the war has received the last five years. (¶ 3)

The primary provisions of the "Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act" (S.22) can be described in five points:

- Increased educational benefits would be available to all members of the military who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001, including activated reservists and National Guard. To qualify, veterans must have served at least three to thirty-six months of qualified active duty, beginning on or after September 11, 2001.
- The bill provides for educational benefits to be paid in amounts linked to the amount of active duty served in the military after 9/11. Generally, veterans would receive some amount of assistance proportional to their service for 36 months, which equals four academic years. Veterans would still be eligible to receive any incentive-based supplemental educational assistance from their military branch for which they qualify.

- Benefits provided under the bill would allow veterans pursuing an approved program of education to receive payments covering the established charges of their program, up to the cost of the most expensive in-state public school, plus a monthly stipend equivalent to housing costs in their area. The bill would allow additional payments for tutorial assistance, as well as licensure and certification tests.
- The bill would create a new program in which the government will agree to match, dollar for dollar, any voluntary additional contributions to veterans from institutions whose tuition is more expensive than the maximum educational assistance provided under S.22.
- Veterans would have up to fifteen years, compared to ten years under the Montgomery G.I. Bill, after they leave active duty to use their educational assistance entitlement. Veterans would be barred from receiving concurrent assistance from this program and another similar program. (“Facts about Senator Webb’s Bipartisan GI Bill,” 2008, ¶ 4-8)

The increase in benefits which took effect in August of 2009 is a giant leap in the direction of ameliorating the paltry incentive to serve that sufficed during times of peace (Webb & Hagel, 2007).

#### The Value of Veterans’ Education to Society

The value of educating veterans was clearly demonstrated by the prosperity afforded by the original G.I. Bill of Rights after WWII. If education is the key to a prosperous nation, then in order to emulate the success of the first G.I. Bill the current state of educational affairs must be closely examined. The recent literature abounds with information linking societal ills such as homelessness, alcoholism, suicide, and drug abuse to PTSD and an inability of the veteran to reintegrate into civilian life (e.g., Barnes, 2008; Lederman, 2008b; Lewis & Sokolow, 2008; Madhani, 2008; O’Brien, 2008; Redden, 2008a; Storer, 2007; Sullivan, 2008; Veterans and Higher, 2008; Ward, 2008). Post-trauma embitterment disorder (PTED) (“Bitterness and Resentment,” 2008) and

battlemind (“Army Behavioral,” 2008) have recently been recognized as subclassifications of reactive and maladaptive disorders respectively.

Combat war veteran counselor Manuel Martinez (as cited in Redden, 2008a) coined the term “military readjustment transition issues” to explain difficulties such as homelessness and unemployment that are experienced by some veterans as they transition from combat into the civilian world. In his *Catholic Explorer* article, “Shelter Provides Stability for Struggling Veterans,” Paul Storer (2007) interviews Bob Adams, U.S. Navy veteran and co-founder of the Midwest Shelter for Homeless Veterans in Wheaton, Illinois. The shelter provides transitional services for veterans including job training and education that will foster independent living (Storer, 2007; Ward, 2008). According to the Bureau of Statistics (2008), the unemployment rate for male Gulf War II era veterans between the ages of 18 and 24 is 11.2 percent. Aptly, McQuarrie and Sennot (2007) emphasize that college attendance is recognized as an important factor in addressing PTSD. Hence, it does not come as a surprise that education is considered key to better assimilating veterans into the civilian world.

The strongest argument for providing educational opportunity for veterans is made by Greenberg (1997) who asserts that education is the antidote to societal tribulations, such as unemployment and homelessness:

For every dollar spent on GI Bill education benefits, the nation received as much as eight dollars in income taxes but the true value is incalculable. This could be attributed then, and even more so in the 1990’s, to the correlation between increased earning capacity and educational achievement. (p. 37)

President George Bush (1990) in his remarks at a ceremony honoring the GI Bill proclaimed,

The GI Bill has special importance . . . to the peace and prosperity that America has enjoyed during the 46 years since it first began. The GI Bill changed the lives of millions by replacing old roadblocks with paths of opportunity. And, in so doing, it boosted America's work force, it boosted America's economy, and really, it changed the life of our nation. (¶ 6)

Thus education serves as an effective fulcrum of transition from military to civilian life.

The next section examines why community colleges should position themselves at the forefront of veterans' education.

### The GI Bill Meets Today's Community College

Community colleges have been at the forefront of change while serving their communities since the turn of the last century (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Because the community colleges enroll more than 50% of all students currently participating in post secondary education in the United States (AACC, 2008), many returning veterans are expected to use the community college as a gateway for reintegration into society.

Moreover, Alvarez (2008) states that many young people use military service as a means to obtain an education and the literature shows agreement that American community college campuses can expect to experience an influx of veterans (Field, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Lewis & Sokolow, 2008; Palm, 2008; Pulley, 2008; Sachs, 2008).

Although attending a community college can be less costly than a four year institution, tuition is not the only factor that influences a veteran's decision to attend a community college. Alvarez (2008) explains why veterans would choose a community college program over a four-year institution despite having federal dollars available for university tuition:

Two-year colleges offer flexible class schedules, enroll older students and can feel less intimidating—all important issues to veterans, who are usually older and

often married with families. Online programs are popular for the same reasons. . . . Veterans, for the most part, do not have an easy time getting into four-year colleges and universities, particularly selective private ones. Boredom or frustration with high school—often accompanied by mediocre transcripts and SAT scores—led many into the military in the first place. (§ 14 & 16)

The option of living at home while attending school is undoubtedly an added attraction to veterans who are readjusting to civilian life.

### Hindsight as Foresight for Disenfranchised Students

Community colleges have historically been quick to respond to economic and population changes, and have been at the forefront of program development for the underserved. For example, when mainstream post secondary education ignored women, blacks, and Native Americans, special focus schools emerged to assist them (Townsend, as cited in Townsend & Bragg, 2006). More specifically, associate professor Laura Rendon (1994), whose specialty is the study of underrepresented student populations such as community college Hispanic students, correlates student success with involvement and validation. Her theory of validation from research related to the success of Latino students has practical application to veterans' education as well. Veterans, like other student cohorts, have a need for validation that is critical to student success. Rendon aptly states,

Diversity in nature is a strength. So is diversity among college students. The challenge is how to harness that strength, and how to unleash the creativity and exuberance for learning that is present in all students who feel free to learn, free to be who they are, and validated for what they know and believe. (p. 51)

It therefore seems reasonable that knowledge previously learned about disenfranchised students can be pertinent to the education of veterans. Furthermore, in Laden's (1999) article, "Socializing and Mentoring College Students of Color: The

Puente Project as an Exemplary Celebratory Socialization Model” and a chapter authored by Laden (2006), “Celebratory Socialization of Culturally Diverse Students Through Academic Programs and Support Services,” she gives her readers pause to contemplate the practicality and feasibility of transferring the concept of a “web of empowerment” (Laden, 2006, p. 412) to students who belong to the distinctively nontraditional *returning veteran* cohort. Just as Laden found a gap in the literature with regard to Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI’s), there is a gap in the current literature with regard to veterans’ education.

Community colleges provide opportunity for students who might not otherwise have a chance to attend college. Thomas Bailey and Vanessa Smith Morest (2006), authors of “Defending the Community College Equity Agenda” state, “Enrollment data clearly show that community colleges play an important role in educating students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those who face various barriers to higher education” (p. 7). Veterans have put their lives and education on hold, and in many instances come or return to the table of higher education facing obstacles which will later be addressed. In addition, many veterans are members of ethnic minorities who are first generation college students.

The U.S. Bureau of Statistics reports that overall minority accessions for combined branches of the armed services are 33% of the total accessions (U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics, 2004). Table 1 reveals the distribution of racial and ethnic differences among the services with the highest percentage of minorities being in the Navy at 40%. The Marine Corps maintains the highest Hispanic percentage

among the branches of the armed forces, while the Navy has the highest percentage of blacks. This data on racial and ethnic distribution in the armed forces demonstrates that by serving veterans, the needs of ethnic minorities and emerging majorities are concomitantly served.

*Why Veterans are Deserving of Validating Treatment*

Many of the same issues addressed by Laden (as cited in Townsend & Bragg, 2006) and other authors, who have written extensively on the topic of minority and emerging majority students in higher education, are identified in higher education's veteran population (Field, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Lewis & Sokolow, 2008; Palm, 2008; Pulley, 2008; Sachs, 2008). For example, Latino students placed in remedial courses tend to experience frustration at being wedged in the crevice of remediation and view their educational dreams as out of reach; veterans could easily find themselves in the same remedial box as many return from war with not even a high school diploma (Pulley, 2008). In addition, the returning war veteran has needs beyond the scope of dealing with the frustrations of educational remediation. For example, writer for *Inside Higher*

*Education* Rose Sachs (2008) states:

Many combat veterans return with mental health needs that can complicate educational achievement. In addition to specific disorders such as traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder, combat veterans experience psychosocial disruption as they rapidly transition from the role from [*sic*] warrior to that of student. (¶ 2)

Madhani (2008) writes in his article "Army's battle: Mental illness," about the lack of mental health resources for returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. According to many sources, including Capacio (2008), who is a writer for "The Online Community to Help

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans,” and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (2008), at least 40,000 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD, a debilitating mental disorder that is etiologically linked to a traumatic event. “The magnitude of mental health problems is something the Defense Department is only starting to confront, according to some lawmakers” (Madhani, ¶ 18). The following case of a soldier’s attempted suicide as presented in Madhani’s article illustrates how treatment of mental health problems can clash with the warrior culture:

[Goldsmith’s superior officer] quickly initiated an administrative punishment known as an Article 15 against Goldsmith for malingering—that is, feigning a mental lapse or derangement...to avoid being deployed to Iraq....Because he did not receive an honorable discharge, Goldsmith was stripped of his Montgomery GI Bill benefits, which he’d been counting on to help pay for college. Goldsmith’s tough treatment is not unheard of....Goldsmith remains adamant that he did not fake a mental illness. After Goldsmith’s discharge, a psychologist with the Department of Veterans Affairs diagnosed him with post-traumatic stress disorder.... ‘I went from being a sergeant responsible for six peoples’ lives and millions of dollars in equipment to becoming the pizza delivery boy,’ he said....The Pentagon’s figures account only for those who have sought help; a recent study by RAND Corp. put the number close to 300,000. (p. 9)

According to Madhani, a serious rise in suicides has been reported by the Pentagon, which acknowledges 2007 as the highest rate known to exist. Madhani quotes Lt. Gen Eric Schoomaker, the Army’s highest ranking medical officer as stating:

I think we can say as a nation that our mental health facilities and access to mental health providers is not adequate to the need right now. . . . So part of the problem that we as a military are suffering is a shared national problem. (p. 9)

Table 1

*Distribution of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the United States Armed Forces*

|                | Army | Navy | Marine Corps | Air Force | DoD  |
|----------------|------|------|--------------|-----------|------|
| <u>Males</u>   |      |      |              |           |      |
| White          | 69.6 | 61.6 | 71.4         | 74.7      | 69.0 |
| Black          | 14.6 | 17.1 | 9.7          | 13.6      | 14.0 |
| Hispanic       | 11.2 | 12.1 | 13.6         | 6.9       | 11.1 |
| Other          | 4.6  | 9.2  | 5.3          | 4.9       | 5.9  |
| <u>Females</u> |      |      |              |           |      |
| White          | 53.0 | 55.2 | 63.5         | 63.9      | 57.3 |
| Black          | 28.3 | 21.2 | 13.7         | 21.9      | 23.8 |
| Hispanic       | 13.3 | 13.7 | 16.0         | 8.3       | 12.2 |
| Other          | 5.4  | 9.9  | 6.8          | 5.9       | 6.7  |
| <u>Total</u>   |      |      |              |           |      |
| Male           | 81.5 | 82.6 | 93.2         | 76.0      | 82.7 |
| Female         | 18.5 | 17.4 | 6.8          | 24.0      | 17.3 |
| White          | 66.5 | 60.5 | 70.8         | 72.1      | 67.0 |
| Black          | 17.1 | 17.8 | 10.0         | 15.5      | 15.7 |
| Hispanic       | 11.6 | 12.4 | 13.8         | 7.3       | 11.3 |

Note. Numbers in the table are percentages of the total personnel on active duty.

Validation of veterans' needs and the concomitant desire of community colleges to increase enrollment can easily compliment one another. With the new G.I. Bill, institutions of higher education will be competing with one another for the dollars that veterans will bring to their school of choice. As veterans will most likely choose a veteran friendly institution over one that is difficult to navigate, it behooves the community college to seek recommendations for improving the community college experience of veterans and active duty students. The next section examines some of the ways state governments and institutions of higher education are responding to the educational needs of veterans.

#### *Current Response to Veterans' Education*

Preparing people for the future through education is critical to the economic health of the nation, and herein lies the critical nature of veterans' education. Because the purpose of this study is to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs, this section examines some of the pioneering ways state governments, community colleges and four year institutions are responding to the educational needs of veterans. For example, California Governor Schwarzenegger has spearheaded the Troops to College Program which has identified campuses with best practices ("Community Colleges," 2008). Veteran outreach through the use of job and education fairs on military bases and website updates that connect veterans' support groups are some of the strategies employed by this program. Citrus Community College District in California, a member of the largest higher educational system in the nation, is the first community

college to develop a veteran transition program, “Boots to Books” for veterans and their families (“Community Colleges,” 2008). The caveat to the success of this district’s program might be the Veterans Administrator counselor, who teaches in the program and is a combat veteran himself.

On another front, the presidents of the Illinois community colleges have formed a partnership with the Illinois National Guard and are preparing to implement veteran friendly programs at community colleges across the state (Brown, 2008). The Illinois community colleges and National Guard will jointly promote reintegration programs for families, act as a conduit for veterans and family assistance centers, and establish on-campus veterans’ centers. Emphasis on family involvement appears to be a common thread throughout the discussion and implementation of successful veterans’ educational initiatives.

Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) in Central Massachusetts is constructing a unique prototype residential treatment and education complex for veterans who suffer from traumatic injuries, and their families, where the family therapy is considered critical to patient care (Macquarrie, 2007; “Mass. College,” 2008; Redden, 2008d). The project is funded by Veteran Homestead (2008), a nonprofit organization that offers psychological, medical, and spiritual support to veterans in need, through grants and donations. MWCC’s visionary president, Daniel M. Asquino, hails the project as a creative paradigm for veterans’ education (Redden, 2008d). CEO and founder of Veteran Homestead, Leslie Lightfoot, envisions the MWCC project as the culminating development of smaller projects, which have blossomed into a working system that can

be replicated by other community colleges and institutions of higher learning (Redden). *Inside Higher Education* reporter Elizabeth Redden quotes Lightfoot as saying, “ ‘Pieces of this are being done in lots of places. Some people do rehab and some schools provide education. There are bits and pieces but no one has ever pulled it together, and it just seemed like the logical thing to do’ ” (§ 4). In Lightfoot’s statement, “They [MWCC] really understood what a win-win it is for everybody—the veterans, the college and the community as well” (“Mass. College,” 2008, ¶ 9), she demonstrates an understanding of the cascading nature that educating and caring for veterans provides at a grassroots level.

Cleveland State University has spearheaded a specialized program for veterans under the auspices of a chemistry professor, John Schupp, where the veterans attend their first year classes as a cohort (Redden, 2008a). In an interview with news reporter Lizette Alvarez (2008), Schupp shared what he deemed to be the most powerful influence on veterans’ education—mothers. Thus, the thread of family inclusion is manifested in the study of veterans’ education.

Although Schupp’s cohort model of veterans’ education is still in the experimental stage, he has observed, “that many veterans have an easier time concentrating when, instead of being surrounded by civilians they’re trained to protect, they’re encircled by other veterans, their ‘team’. . . . The team is what helps you survive. . . . All I’m trying to do is recreate the team concept” (Redden, 2008a, ¶ 12-13). Learning communities offer a viable alternative to the downside of classic remediation (Levin & Calcagno, 2008). According to Levin and Koski (as cited in Levin & Calcagno, 2008),

the learning community concept bestows to students nine core educational elements needed for classroom success:

- **motivation:** building on the interests and goals of the students and providing institutional credit toward degrees or certificates;
  - **substance:** building skills within a substantive or real-world context as opposed to using a more abstract approach;
  - **inquiry:** developing students' inquiry and research skills to help them investigate other subjects and areas about which they might be curious;
  - **independence:** encouraging students to do independent meandering within the course structure so that they will develop their own ideas, applications, and understandings;
  - **multiple approaches:** using collaboration and teamwork, technology, tutoring, and independent investigation as suited to student needs;
  - **high standards:** setting high standards and expectations that all students will meet if they exert adequate effort and if they are given appropriate resources to support their learning;
  - **problem solving:** viewing learning less as an encyclopedic endeavor and more as a way of determining what needs to be learned and how to develop a strategy that will succeed;
  - **connectiveness:** emphasizing the links among different subjects and experiences, and showing how they can contribute to learning, rather than seeing each subject and learning experience as isolated and independent;
  - **supportive context:** recognizing that to a large degree learning is a social activity that thrives on healthy social interaction, encouragement, and support.
- (¶ 12)

Schupp's contention is supported to the extent that Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MRDC) and the National Center for Postsecondary Research (NCPR) are sponsoring large quantitative studies for the U.S. Department of Education that resurrect the educational reform concept of small learning communities (SLC) at the high school and community college levels. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2008), "The primary purpose of the [MRDC-NCPR high school] study was to evaluate the implementation of the federal education law that authorizes funding for the SLC program, by describing the strategies and practices used in implementing SLC's"

(p. 1). Results showed that high school students participating in learning communities (experimental group) had statistically significant improvements in their coursework compared to students who did not participate in learning communities (control group) (Jaschik, 2008a). Although the MDRC-NCPR student participants were high school students, the research has implications for the college level. Thus the benefits provided by a veterans' learning community could be substantial.

The MDRC-NCPR learning community study at the community college level focused on implementation, impact, and program cost (Visher et al., 2008). This study examined three areas that have direct implications for veterans who would benefit from a transitional educational program: (a) the development of pedagogy designed for academically unprepared students, (b) measurable achievement outcomes for learning communities, and (c) cost comparison of learning communities and standard basic skills programs. Approximately 1000 students at each of the six community college locations were assigned randomly to a learning community or a control group. Interviews using open ended questions were conducted with each of the learning communities as well as the developmental program staff and administrators. Data were also gathered from classroom observations, faculty surveys, and review of documents related to student outcomes (Visher, et al., 2008).

According to MDRC-NCPR research team members Visher, Wathington, Richburg-Hayes, and Schneider (2008):

Modern learning communities in community colleges typically last one semester, enroll between 20 and 30 first-year students together in two or three linked courses in which curricula are integrated and are loosely organized under an overarching theme and in which such pedagogical practices as active and

collaborative learning and cross-disciplinary instruction and experiences are encouraged. The ‘theory of change’ underlying learning communities posits that students in learning communities become more engaged in learning and in college life because they are more likely to interact socially and intellectually with other students in their courses, form stronger relationships with faculty, and make connections across disciplines and between their academic and personal experiences. This increased social integration and intellectual engagement strengthens the motivation to pursue educational goals. (p. 12)

Moreover, learning communities and other student success programs have been shown to increase retention and concomitantly save colleges money (Lederman, 2010).

MDRC-NCPR’s study fills a gap in the literature that has been identified by Levin and Calcagno (2008) who recommended reducing the number of variables in quantitative studies by comparing only remedial and nonremedial students from comparable backgrounds and academic environments. Moreover, the MDRC-NCPR study was the first study to implement a true random trial (Jaschik, 2008). However, some authors have suggested that rigorous qualitative research should be conducted in the area of developmental education and student learning outcomes (Levin & Calcagno, 2008; Visher et al., 2008).

Existing structures and programs can be readily adapted to veterans’ education. More specifically, courses addressing stress management, basic study skills, and career path classes could easily convert to accommodate veterans (Sachs, 2008). The University of Maryland University College is offering distance courses to students serving in Iraq and Afghanistan (Field, 2008; Foster, 2008). A new “veteran friendly” intervention program called Combat2College (C2C) that effectively links college activities and resources with existing Veteran’s Administration (VA) clinical services has been

developed by Rose Sachs and the C2C team (Lederman, 2008a). Sachs (2008) explains the C2C program as one that does not *reinvent the wheel*:

[It is] an ongoing ‘seamless’ collaboration between a Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center and a community college. C2C provides substantial and comprehensive services to faculty, staff and students, yet remains efficient and simple because it centers on making small adjustments to existing college activities and resources, and works closely with existing VA clinical services. (¶ 4)

The C2C focuses on “inclusiveness, removal of stigma, respect and appreciation, coordination with veterans’ resources, building camaraderie, and having a ‘small footprint’ by not disrupting existing college activities nor requiring expensive resources” (Sachs, 2008, ¶ 5). This makes the program user friendly, replicable, and practicable.

The pioneering University of Maryland University College began offering on-site professor led classes such as psychology, math, and economics in November of 2008 in Iraq where about 300 students have the option of earning an associates degree (Londoño & Kinzie, 2009).

Service members, many of whom had been taking online courses while deployed, were delighted to learn they could attend classes with live professors, said Staff Sgt. Jimmy Labas, 28. The Army pays tuition for its deployed soldiers. ‘It’s a great opportunity,’ he said. ‘It helps their morale, and it helps them get ahead.’ (¶ 13)

Yet, president of Servicemember Opportunity Colleges (SOC), Kathy Snead, laments that although there is an awakening to the issues of veterans’ education, not enough is being done (Lederman, 2008b). SOC is an organization dedicated to helping members of the armed forces and their families participate in higher education with the goal of obtaining a college degree (Servicemembers, 2008). The next section explores what has been identified as obstacles to veterans’ education at the institutional level.

*Obstacles Experienced by Veterans in Higher Education.*

In her interview with Redden (2008a), SOC consortium president Kathy Snead emphasizes the importance of integrating the student veteran population into the college atmosphere. Veterans encounter many obstacles to their education such as lack of support services, administrative barriers, the inability to *fit in* with average college students, and difficulty transitioning from the structured military atmosphere to the unstructured life of a civilian (Lewis, 2008; Lewis & Sokolow, 2008). Another obstacle to veterans' education is the issue of cultural insensitivity, which is illustrated by the Student Veterans Association (SVA) president of the University of Michigan who lamented that he stopped telling others he was a veteran after classmates asked him if he had killed anyone (Lederman, 2008b; Field, 2007).

The educational benefits can even be a source of frustration for veterans. Because veterans' benefits are in a constant state of flux, it is difficult for even the specialists to decipher the complex regulations of the GI Bill (Redden, 2008b; Redden, 2008c; Wasley, 2007). Likewise, many veterans are confused as to how their benefits can be put to optimum use (Redden, 2008c). In some cases, veterans are even given incorrect information by the military concerning education benefits upon completion of their service commitment (Wasley, 2007). Frustration with the financial aspects of education coupled with the absence of psychological and emotional support can result in decreases in retention and program completion for veterans.

Veterans should be recognized as a group of students who come to the table of education with unique skills and perspectives, but also with special needs. Alvarez (2008)

states that “Many institutions have failed to make allowances for the soldiers’ special circumstances or to promote themselves as veteran friendly” (§ 16). According to Herrmann, Raybeck and Wilson (2008), in their article “College Is for Veterans, Too,” a common frustration for veterans is the “denial of academic credit for military training and experience that correspond[s] to the content of their college courses” (§ 4). Another obstacle identified by Herrmann et al. is the lack of orientation programs for veterans before matriculation. Because veterans are usually older than the typical college freshman and many are married (Herrmann et al.), it is important for institutions to consider veterans as a unique group of students.

In his article, “The Veterans are Coming! The Veterans are Coming!” Dean of Social Sciences and Humanities at Olympic College and retired Marine officer Palm (2008) views negative attitudes of college personnel as a core obstacle presented to veterans. For example, if the pervasive campus attitude is one of condescendence, pretentious empathy, or pity toward veterans then the outcome would not be positive. Likewise, if the expectation is that veterans will arrive on campus with more problems than any other cohort of students then the obstacle is the expectation itself. Palm concisely states that “the expectation that someone will behave badly can create a self-fulfilling prophecy” (§ 25). Jaschik (2008b) supports Palm’s contention revealing a common mistake made by professors who are confronted with academically under prepared students.

[It is a mistake to] treat the unprepared students with pity, disrespect, or considering them academically incapable of improving. Regardless of a students’ academic history, professors should maintain high levels of expectations for unprepared students since most students tend to respond to how they are treated

and the expectations that are set for them. It is a mistake not to let students know that you expect their best effort, hard work, extra time spent on assignments, and make a commitment to the class if they are behind. (§ 13)

Furthermore, negative speculation that veterans could be viewed with suspicion by acknowledging past fears that the open access policy of higher education would lead to a dilution of standards in higher education poisons the well of educational opportunity for veterans.

Veterans, like any other student group, have a need for validation and early intervention. Community colleges would be wise to focus on the needs of the veteran population, lest they lose a viable part of their potential student base. Berta Laden (as cited in Townsend & Bragg, 2006) originated the term *reverse acculturation*, which reminds institutions that the tables have turned. In the past, higher education insisted that students adapt to the learning institution, and concern for student attrition was minimal; however, today's learning institutions need to adapt as there is more competition for enrollments and the colleges are being held accountable for completion rates. The next section explains why community colleges need to be concerned about recruitment and retention of veterans and examines suggestions for overcoming the obstacles found in higher education.

#### *Why and How Community Colleges Should Care About Veterans' Education*

According to Snead (as cited in Redden, 2008a), colleges are expressing interest in understanding the veterans' number game. Colleges appreciate the fact that the more equipped they are to handle the influx of veterans, the more likely the veterans are to choose their institution, and the veterans come with federal dollars. "The good news

about . . . the returning veterans is – in this day of rising costs and rising tuition, this is guaranteed money” (Lewis & Sokolow, 2008, p. 14). Student veterans will be looking for veteran friendly institutions to attend. Snead identifies key campus priorities when speaking to *Inside Higher Education* reporter Redden:

Peer-to-peer advising programs, specialized orientations and veteran student centers or lounges. She advocates that colleges set up task forces to identify ‘military-friendly’ approaches they can adopt in academic and student services, counseling and other domains. ‘It’s fertile ground, so there are all sorts of possibilities for what colleges can do.’ (¶ 7)

Palm (2008) explains the positive impact returning veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars could potentially have on higher education as he interweaves two main points. First, Palm argues that veterans come to higher education with the skills, determination, and mature perspective needed for success in the college classroom. Second, he explains the significance of the new expanded GI Bill including the wide reaching impact of the bill for families of veterans. The new GI Bill means that veterans will receive benefits exceeding those of the WWII veterans in that tuition, books, fees, and spending money will be available to the children and spouses of veterans as well (Palm, 2008; Redden, 2008c). Thus the benefit to academe is clear in terms of a potential increase in the pool of students seeking enrollment.

Palm (2008) suggests multiple ways in which college personnel can contribute to the positive education experience of veterans. First, sensitivity training would help to make the institution a veteran friendly campus. Second, Palm suggests five tenets of common sense: (a) Treat veterans like any other student by not making them feel different from other students; (b) only thank a veteran for his or her service if you know

them; (c) do not expect veterans to have cookie-cutter political or ideological views; (d) do not ask a veteran what he or she did in the war; and (e) have the expectation that veterans will succeed in the classroom. Because of his experience in academe and the military, Palm can offer valuable insights concerning both sides of the divide.

Having been both a military officer and an academic, I have learned two things: First, academics are no more open-minded than anyone else; they are just better at articulating and defending their prejudices. Second, I have known Marine colonels who are more collegial and collaborative than commanding, and I have known college presidents who are more commanding than collegial and collaborative. Do not approach today's veterans as 'people who were lost and are now found' (Palm, ¶ 13).

The literature shows that there are differing opinions on what constitutes helpful behavior on the part of college personnel. For example, Sachs (2008), in her article "Valuing Veterans," states that a friendly welcome home is warranted. Balancing the needs of veterans without overemphasizing and calling attention to the traumatic side of a veteran's prior war experience should be the goal of college personnel (Sachs, 2008). In summary, veterans bring skills, maturity, and determination that have the potential of strengthening the community college as long as the institution is open to recognizing the needs of veterans and offers a welcoming atmosphere.

#### Theoretical and Conceptual Constructs

Two theories and two concepts provided an analytical framework for this study: (a) Human Capital Theory (HCT) of Education, (b) Rendon's theory of validation, (c) globalization, and (d) holistic spirituality. At first glance HCT of Education seems harsh for this research; however, its main concept of recognizing human knowledge as

intellectual capital uplifts humanity when integrated with the concepts of globalization and holistic spirituality.

### *Human Capital Theory of Education*

The Human Capital Theory originated approximately 200 years ago with the insight of Adam Smith who posited that people were the source of a nation's wealth, at a time when human knowledge was treated as a consumable good (Hornbeck & Salamon, 1991). Depending on the contextual presentation, HCT can seem human friendly or harsh. While president of the American Economic Association in 1960, Theodore Schultz (as cited in Karabel & Halsey, 1977) presented the HCT within the context of human resources in that knowledge acquired through education was a form of productive investment, not consumption of a good. Schultz, a Nobel laureate, was convinced that self-investment sets forth increased opportunity. More importantly, Schultz did not condone using humans for the sake of advancement.

The HCT of Education by itself gives an *accountant's* view of human worth (Spring, 1998). Salamon (1991) explained that

human capital refers to the acquired skills, knowledge, and abilities of human beings. Underlying the concept is the notion that such skills and knowledge increase human productivity, and that they do so enough to justify the costs incurred in acquiring them. It is in this sense that expenditures on improving human capabilities can be thought of as 'investments.' They generate future income or output that justifies the amounts spent on them. (p. 3)

The theory's severity is tempered by the practicality of its higher education goal, which is to get a job, unless the investment is high and the returns are low (Spring, 1998).

There are three primary reasons for using the HCT of Education in the context of this research. First, this theory speaks the language of legislators who influence the daily

workings of the community college. Walter McMahon (1974), professor of economics emeritus and educational organization and leadership emeritus at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, aptly stated,

The concept of *investment* in human resources is of continuing and increasing importance to policies toward higher education in the United States. It can be interpreted broadly to include not only investment yielding private monetary returns, but also consumer investment yielding nonmonetary returns from a stock of educational capital at later dates, as well as public investment yielding some purely social benefits. The concept of investment involving returns later is easily understood by lawmakers. (pp. 165-166)

Moreover, McMahon (2010) explained that the benefits of education's nonmonetary returns such as good health, increased longevity, and greater happiness impact society as well as the individual.

Second, there is a basic principle that education equals economic growth (Spring, 1998), and third, since veterans are members of a market driven, capitalist society, they too should benefit from the fruits of education that will enable them to contribute in the strongest sense to the market economy. Therefore, the HCT of Education was one of the lenses used for interpreting the findings of this study.

### *Globalization*

A second lens that extends the application of HCT is the concept of globalization. Research concerning community college students, including veterans, needs to factor-in the basic premise that upon graduation students expect gainful employment. Because education is an integral part of globalization that embraces the market economy (Spring, 1998), education of the populace can be considered critical to the economic well being of the nation. According to Boulton (2005), someone who truly understood this relationship

was Ogden Reid, a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives and Army Lieutenant; he understood the economic advantage of educational opportunities.

Moreover, global economist Lester Thurow, (as cited in Karabel & Halsey, 2007) argued that effective education is derived from an acknowledgement of the labor market's standard economic theory, which matches labor supply and demand. Herein lies the connection between the encompassing umbrella of HCT and globalization. Human capital, as knowledge, is the instrument of choice for sustaining a competitive edge in a global world (Friedman, 2006).

Globalization, being in the driver's seat of HCT of Education, affects the workings of the community college as much as it affects the veterans. "As a conceptual framework, globalization enhances our understanding of organizational behaviors and institutional identity, touching on such topics as organizational change, leadership, education, and work" (Levin, 2001, p. xiii). Three times Pulitzer Prize winner Thomas Friedman (2006) intersects intellectual capital and the economy at the juncture of individual work ethic. He posits that when people have a stake in their investment they will be more productive. Friedman's reference to community college education as America's "muscles" (p. 368) not only exposes the importance of globalization, but widens the lens of HCT as well. "Everyone should have a chance to be educated beyond high school. . . . JFK wanted to put a man on the moon. My vision is to put every American man or woman on a campus" (Friedman, 2006, p. 374). Globalization places the educational welfare of veterans at the forefront of national and local concern in three ways. First, the education of veterans is paramount to a thriving economy, as the

historical contribution of college educated WWII veterans to the nation's well being demonstrated (Greenburg, 1997). Second, community colleges are potentially faced with not being able to accommodate all of the students who will seek admission. The nation continues to experience an economic recession ("Signs Point to Long, Severe Recession," 2008), four-year college tuition continues to increase, and financial aid is in turmoil (Wolverton, 2008). Community colleges will not want to deny admission or lose through attrition, students who have both academic potential and government funding to cover their education expenses. Limited access to education with concomitant tapered student retention could have negative consequences for community colleges as enrollment management is of increasing concern.

Third, an undereducated veteran population whose personal learning opportunities are thwarted could experience disconnection from a knowledge based economy. As Harvard University Professor of Economics and Demography David Bloom (2002) states "Knowledge has become an increasingly important determinant of the wealth of nations, and access to knowledge, and the ability to disseminate it, has become a major source of competitive advantage" (p. 2). Therefore, knowledge as human capital links HCT of education to globalization.

### *Spiritual Learning*

The concept of spiritual learning or learning in the context of a spiritual quotient is a third lens from which to view this research. Elizabeth Tisdell (2003), spirituality and cultural specialist in adult development and learning, relates education to seven assumptions about spirituality:

1. Spirituality and religion are not the same....
2. Spirituality is about awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things....
3. Spirituality is fundamentally about meaning-making.
4. Spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment.
5. Spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self.
6. Spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes....
7. Spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise. (p. xi)

Tisdell's (2003) components of spirituality are similar to Friedman's (2006) curiosity (CQ) and passion quotients (PQ), which he argues are more important than the intelligence quotient (IQ) in the *flat* world of instantaneously processed information. Opportunity in a flat world lies in an ability to forge relationships and offer value to an employer through the use of people skills. Friedman calls this the "right-brain stuff" (p. 302), which essentially equates to Tisdell's (2003) meaning making by life's synaptic interconnections. Moreover, according to Merriam, Cafferella, and Baumgartner (2007), an emphasis on mind, body, and learning connections is a necessary component of meaning making.

#### *Rendon's Theory*

The final analytical lens used in this study to interpret the data and findings has been Rendon's theory of validation. Just as globalization is a driving force for the HCT of Education, spirituality can be seen as the inspiring force for Rendon's theory of validation, as it fosters awareness of each person's promise of potential which is requisite for validation. According to Townsend and Bragg's (2006) analysis of Rendon's Theory,

six elements of the theory demonstrate the need for this awareness on the part of students, faculty, advisors, and others involved in the education of all students.

This first element is important because it places the responsibility for initiating contact with students on institutional agents such as faculty and counselors.... They cannot ask what they do not know. Second is the notion that when validation is present, students feel capable of learning as well as a sense of self worth. This is absolutely essential for students who lack self-confidence in their ability to be successful college students. Third . . . validation is a prerequisite to student development. In other words, students are more likely to get involved and feel confident after they experience academic and/or interpersonal validation on a consistent basis. Fourth is that validation can occur in and out of class with multiple agents such as faculty, classmates, family members, spouses, children, partners, tutors, teaching assistants, coaches, advisers, and so on actively affirming and supporting students and/or designing activities that promote academic excellence and personal growth. Fifth is that validation is a developmental process as opposed to an end in itself. (Townsend & Bragg, 2006, p. 426)

Additionally, validation of the spirit contributes to the wholeness of a person, and comes through encouragement, family support, and example; therefore, Rendon's theory of validation (Rendon, 1994) has been used as a fine lens to adjust the concept of spirituality for viewing this study's results. Rendon's findings from her research on nontraditional minority and underserved student populations serve as a workable paradigm for serving veterans' who experience circumstances similar to the students in Rendon's studies.

In brief, the reason for using the HCT of Education, Rendon's theory of validation, and the interrelated concepts of globalization and spiritual learning was to design breadth into the holistic interpretation of this study's data and findings.

## Summary

Because the purpose of the study is to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs, this research is situated in a historical context beginning with pre WWI and ending with the current Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The historical examination of veterans' benefits, particularly related to education, reveal economic, moral, and practical incentives for providing or denying benefits to veterans. The fickle pendulum of support has swung from the fear of a "Hessian mercenary" (Boulton, 2005, p. 23) to the WWII frenzy of support culminating in an American economic boom, and then to the hostile disregard for the returning Vietnam veteran. Somewhere in the arc of the swing lies the present moment of returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans.

The section on background and context served to examine the many facets of veterans' education. First, an educated veteran population was shown to be a patent benefit to society. Second, the reasons that society should care about veterans were viewed from the lenses of economic benefit and societal obligation. Third, the unique approach of viewing veterans as a cohort of students that could benefit from research concerning higher education's previous response to disenfranchised students was explored. An argument was made that veterans deserve the same level of effort put forth in validating minority students. Fourth, literature reporting on unique and compelling ways higher education is currently addressing the issue of veterans' education was reviewed. Community colleges are responding to the influx of veterans into higher

education with an eye on both federal dollars and a public sentiment anxious to see veterans served.

Fifth, the obstacles to veterans' education remain ever present with lack of support services, administrative barriers, cultural insensitivity, and military to civilian transition difficulties. Sixth, the reasons that community colleges should care about veterans' education were examined. Veterans will choose the veteran friendly institution over one that does not appear to support their success. With federal dollars at stake, retention being of concern to policy makers, and public opinion demanding accountability, community colleges will benefit from identifying and addressing the needs of veterans. These students bring maturity, experience, skills, and motivation to the classroom.

Finally, the theoretical lenses of HCT of Education and Rendon's theory of validation were presented with the concepts of globalization and spirituality providing the tools to finely adjust the interpretation of this study's findings. By melding together the four lenses, a balanced picture of the data emerged yielding a useful and unique perspective on the timely topic of veterans' education.

The review of literature revealed a lack of qualitative research on veterans' education in general and there was no research on veterans attending community colleges. Moreover, the paucity of published research on returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans makes this study timely and important to higher education. Therefore, this research makes a contribution to the body of knowledge, and potentially to practice at community colleges. In brief, the study fills a gap in the literature by providing a

framework to examine concerns of veterans as they seek reentry into the civilian world via education at the community college.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the qualitative case study research design is explained including the sample selection, instrumentation, data collection methods, ethical considerations, data analysis procedures, verification techniques, and limitations. The chapter begins by reviewing the purpose, research questions, and significance of the study.

#### Restatement of the Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs. The research questions are:

1. What do veterans perceive their needs to be at the community college?
2. What programs and services are currently in place at the community college to address the needs of veterans?
3. What recommendations can be made for improving the community college experience of veterans?

As a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Post 9/11 GI Bill, community colleges must be prepared to serve a growing veteran student population. This research study provides insights concerning the needs of these students and ways in which the community college can address these needs. Moreover, the study presents a holistic account of the community college experience that adds to the body of knowledge and contributes to a future blueprint for the education of community college students who are veterans.

## Research Design

### *Qualitative Methodology*

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest (needs and support of veterans attending the community college) a qualitative methodology was used to conduct this study. The research was exploratory in nature, and the contextually based way of understanding the data known as constructivism (interpretivism) provided a wide lens to develop the relationship between the researcher's observations and the larger context into which the study fit (Willis, 2007).

Qualitative methodology allowed the researcher to gather the individual perspectives and detailed data that were required to answer the study's research questions. Because the reality of veterans' education is subjective and the dynamic behavior of the human participants is contextual, qualitative inquiry was the best approach for this research. According to Johnson and Christensen (2007), it is the *words and meaning* of the qualitative paradigm that impart richness to the design of the study. This study was interpretive in nature because it sought to know the participants' perceptions of the community college's programs and services that are essential to meeting their needs. Professor and associate dean for research in the College of Education at Louisiana State University, Jerry Willis (2007), states that "the goal of interpretive research is an understanding of a particular situation or context much more than the discovery of universal laws or rules" (p. 99). Willis writes that the qualitative paradigm does not hold exclusive rights to interpretivist research, as interpretivists claim that research on human behavior can never be objective.

This study embodied the essential paradigm characteristics of qualitative research, as described by Creswell (2007) and other qualitative research scholars. First, the researcher was the instrument for data collections. The qualitative paradigm, being non-interventional, positioned the researcher as an observer of situations within the context of the study, and as the analyst of data collected to explore the issue of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Leedy and Ormrod (2005), authors of *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, concur, “Qualitative researchers are often described as *being* the research instrument because the bulk of their data collection is dependent on their personal involvement (interviews, observation) in the setting” (p. 96).

Second, the setting was field focused and natural, as the study took place on the campus of a Midwestern community college, where the participants experienced the phenomenon under study. Data were gathered by conducting semistructured interviews with the participants. The open ended question format that is often used in qualitative studies enabled the exploratory nature of the research by eliciting further information from the participants (Hoepfl, 1997). The third characteristic of qualitative research applicable to this study was its use of multiple data sources that enable triangulation. In addition to student interviews and observations, document reviews and a focus group were used in order to know what is or is not in place to serve the needs of veterans who seek a community college education.

Fourth, an inductive approach to data analysis was used, which according to Johnsons and Christensen (2004), elicits a bottom up pattern of organizing data. As Creswell (2007) states,

This inductive process involves research working back and forth between the themes and the database until they establish a comprehensive set of themes. It may also involve collaborating with the participants interactively, so that they have a chance to shape the themes or abstractions that emerge from the process. (p. 39)

Fifth, the study portrayed a complex picture of veterans' educational issues as the research developed. The qualitative paradigm extracted a holistic account of the participants' experiences; it exposed the complex interactions and multiple perspectives offered by all participant groups in this study. Willis (2007) stresses the importance of the reflexive nature of qualitative research, as *understanding* rather than truth is sought. Sixth, an understanding of the phenomenon of interest was achieved through the use of theoretical and conceptual lenses. According to Creswell (2007), human behaviors are understood when interpreted through a social, political, historical, or cultural lens. The context of veterans' education issues was viewed using the theoretical and conceptual lenses of the Human Capital Theory (HCT) of Education, Rendon's theory of validation, globalization, and holistic spirituality.

As data were collected and analyzed, the seventh property of qualitative design was revealed. Creswell (2007) uses the term "*emergent design*" (p. 39) when describing the ability to modify a research plan as the study progresses. As open ended interviews illuminated participants' meanings, and documents were reviewed, patterns became apparent to the researcher. Eighth, the researcher was cognizant of the impact her background and prior experiences had on data interpretation. According to Creswell, the researcher, participants, and readers of the study contribute to the study's multiple perspectives. Qualitative inquiry affords interpretive flexibility that is sensitive to the

researchers' prior life experiences, and allows the researcher to describe and contemplate the findings within the context of the researcher's background (Creswell, 2007). Willis (2007) describes the process as *reflective* for the reader as well as the researcher. The researcher must also reconcile the interaction between the research participants and the researcher, as the interaction changes the dynamics of the natural *in situ* setting (Willis, 2007).

Qualitative methodology does not encumber the study with the traditional guidelines, controls, and experimental aspects of quantitative research although the pattern of scientific research is followed (Creswell, 2007). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research is a multi-step creation of readable text that originates from field interpretations. Moreover, researchers who explore educational issues often employ qualitative methodology (Johnson & Christensen, 2007). In this study, the qualitative methodology enabled the researcher to capture the perspectives of veterans and professionals at a community college through their own words and interpretations in order to gain insights into the phenomenon of veterans' needs and college support.

#### *Case Study Method*

The strategy of inquiry for this research was the case study method. Because the purpose of the study was to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs, the design required a reflective, holistic, and in-depth exploratory method, which was met by the case study approach as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005).

Robert Yin (1994), internationally renowned for his expertise on applied social research states, “You would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions—believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (p. 13). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) explain the value of case study when exploring “little known or poorly understood situation[s]” (p. 135). Thus, the absence of prior research on veterans’ education positioned this study within the ambit of case study method.

Creswell states that case study research is done when an issue is explored within a bounded system (2007). Four characteristics of case study method, as described by Creswell, were integral to the design of this study: (a) the focus of this case study was a single case; (b) the case study provided an in depth understanding; (c) the data collection was from multiple sources, including a demographic survey, semistructured interviews, observations, field notes, and documents; and (d) the data were analyzed by case description (coding) and discovering commonalities of the written case (themes).

Qualitative researcher Sharan Merriam (1988) defines case study as “an examination of a specific phenomenon such as . . . an institution. The bounded system, or case might be selected because it is an instance of some concern [or] issue” (pp. 9-10). For this research the phenomenon of veterans’ education was examined within the context of one community college. The extensive data this research produced yielded insights into the perspectives of the participants as emerging themes were revealed through analysis. This research integrated Merriam’s four delineated characteristics of qualitative case study:

Particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. . . . *Particularistic* means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent. . . . *Descriptive* means that the end product of a case study is a rich, [thick] description of the phenomenon under study. . . . *Hueristic* means that case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known. . . . *Inductive* means that, for the most part, case studies rely on inductive reasoning. Generalizations, concepts, or hypotheses emerge from an examination of data—data grounded in the context itself. (1988, pp. 11 & 13)

Specifically, the case study method enabled this research to comprehensively explore the phenomenon of interest within one clearly bounded case, a community college, and address the research questions. The physical boundary of this study is the campus of a Midwestern community college. The overarching research question of whether or not the community college is meeting the needs of its students who are veterans belongs in the realm of exploratory case study because the rich data generated by the method lends clarity and depth of understanding to the phenomenon. The data analysis approach of case study for this research is holistic, as it searches for threaded themes that illuminate the case (Creswell, 2007). The narrative focus of the case study design is one that discusses issues, findings, and future implications of the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). This research adds to the body of knowledge and provides insights to the institution's promising practices for meeting the needs of these students.

### Participants

Data for this study was collected by purposeful sampling. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005),

In purposive sampling, people or other units are chosen, as the name implies, for a particular *purpose*. For instance, we might choose people who we have decided are ‘typical’ of a group or those who represent diverse perspectives on an issue. (p. 206)

In this research, the first task was to identify characteristics desired in the case study institution and then to identify participants that would view the phenomenon of interest from various perspectives dependent on their role in the college and their past experience. Creswell (2007) posits,

The concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research. This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study. Decisions need to be made about who or what should be sampled, what form the sampling will take, and how many sites or people need to be sampled. (p. 125)

Creswell further states that each level of sampling needs to be identified.

“Researchers can sample at the site level . . . and at the participant level. In a good plan for a qualitative study, one or more of these levels might be present and they each need to be identified” (p. 126).

### *Case Selection*

Because the intent of this research was to explore in detail veterans’ education in the community college context, the programs and services of one community college were examined. According to Creswell (2007), the “typical case highlights what is normal or average” (p. 127). For this research the sampling technique for determining the study site was chosen by utilizing Creswell’s (2007) “Typology of Sampling Strategies in Qualitative Inquiry” (p. 127). Relative to student population, the site chosen was a large community college that offers a comprehensive curriculum, and serves greater than

15,000 students per semester. Approximately 1300 veterans attend the case institution with most of them receiving benefits. The research participants, programs, and services at the college offered a data rich opportunity for addressing the research questions. The Illinois community college campus location draws students from diverse (size, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity) surrounding towns. Moreover, the institution was interested in the study and permitted the researcher excellent access to data and participants.

### *Participant Selection*

Criterion and chain sampling were used to select participants within the case study institution. According to Creswell's (2007), "Typology of Sampling Strategies in Qualitative Inquiry . . . Criterion [is a] type of sampling [where] all cases that meet some criterion [are] useful for quality assurance" (p. 127). For this study, sampling criteria were established and met for each of the five participant groups. First, the student interviewees had to be (a) currently enrolled at the case study institution and (b) U.S. military veterans. All but one of the student participants had served in either the Iraq or Afghanistan theaters. Second, the faculty interviewees had to (a) be current faculty at the case study institution and (b) have demonstrated interest and involvement in veterans' education. Third, staff interviewees had to be current employees who specifically provide services to veterans. Fourth, administrator interviewees had to be (a) current employees of the institution and (b) either hold a high level administrator position at the president or vice president level or be an administrator who had demonstrated an interest and involvement in veterans' education at the institution. Fifth, the interviewees who were

veterans and former community college students had to have attended the case study institution.

Creswell's (2007), "Typology of Sampling Strategies in Qualitative Inquiry" (p. 127) describes the technique of finding potential research participants from information provided by others as *chain* sampling. For this research, faculty, administrators, and staff members at the case institution contributed to the identification of potential study participants through referrals.

The five participant groups at the case study institution and numbers in each group were students who are veterans (3), administrators (3), faculty (2), staff (1), and former student who is a veteran (1). A focus group provided additional representation of one faculty, student, and staff member. These five participant groups were chosen in order to gain the students' perspective, have representation from the institutional side of the study's focus, and to acquire the perspective of a veteran who previously attended the case institution, thereby providing a retrospective view.

The individuals representing each participant group were purposively chosen because they fit the criteria of the category in which they were placed, and they were interested in the study. Students were recruited for the research by in class announcements and through chain sampling. College employees were recruited through chain sampling and according to their involvement and interest in veterans' education. The participant who was a former community college student veteran was also recruited by chain sampling.

In summary, the five participant groups used for this study represented a comprehensive view of veterans' education in a community college setting as it included students, college employees, and community members who offer multiple lenses for examining the education of veterans who are community college students. The instrumentation used for this research will be discussed in the following section.

### Instrumentation

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), the researcher is the instrument of research when the goal is to understand multiple perspectives of the participants and not to discover an unknown truth. Because the instrument of this research is the researcher, this section will reveal the reasons for choosing the topic of the study. The initial impetus for wanting to explore the issue of veteran's education began on three fronts. First, the researcher's former son-in-law desired a college education. However, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), severe anxiety, and depression triggered from three grueling tours of duty in Iraq as an infantryman with the Marine Corps left him emotionally incapable of managing the rigors of higher education. His perceived inability to further his education and realize the plan he had to attend a community college after deployment contributed to the demise of his marriage.

Second, the researcher has been impacted by the integrity and determination of her community college students who are veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Many of these students have overcome physical, emotional, and mental obstacles while attempting to begin a higher education program and while enrolled in a program of higher

education. Third, the researcher has provided advice to those Marines under her daughter's command who are seeking a community college education.

As the primary instrument of the inquiry, the researcher used reflexivity and triangulation, along with other techniques to support the trustworthiness of the results. In summary, the researcher was the primary instrument of the research in both collecting and interpreting the data. The next section describes the data collection methods used in this research.

### Data Collection Methods

For this study multiple methods were used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings through triangulation. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) state "The researcher must be choosy about the data that he or she gathers and analyzes [lest] . . . an incomplete picture of the phenomenon in question [will result]" (p. 145). Yet, incomplete data is acceptable in qualitative research, as it would be an unlikely feat to consider everything that could have an affect on a particular topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Stake (1995) further states that "The case will not be seen the same by everyone. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case." (p. 64). An understanding or *verstehen* of the case does not have direct application to other cases, but can be used to inform practice (Willis, 2007).

Hoepfl (1997) identifies the two main components of data collection in qualitative research as interviews and observation, whereas Creswell (2007) groups data forms into four "basic types of information: observations (ranging from nonparticipant to participant), interviews (ranging from close-ended to open-ended), documents (ranging

from private to public), and audiovisual material (including materials such as photographs, compact disks, and videotapes)” (p. 131). Creswell acknowledges the constant metamorphosis of data collection techniques resulting from advances in the social sciences and technology. Merriam (1988) describes interviews, observations, and documents as the techniques used for data collection when conducting qualitative case study research. According to Yin (1994), collecting data using different techniques enables triangulation, which enhances the trustworthiness of the research. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) say, “The potential sources of data are limited only by the researcher’s open-mindedness and creativity” (p. 143). For this study, six data collection techniques were used: (a) interviews, (b) a focus group, (c) observations, (d) field notes, (e) documents, and (f) demographic questionnaires.

### *Interviews*

Johnson and Christensen (2004) describe three types of interviews:

- Informal conversational interview – Spontaneously, loosely structured interview
- Interview guide approach – Specific topics and/or open-ended questions are asked in any order
- Standardized open-ended interview – A set of open-ended questions are asked in a specific order and exactly as worded.

Because the purpose of the study was to identify the needs of veterans who are college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs, the interview process was consistently open ended lending continuity to the research. The interview questions (see Appendixes A, B, and C) were developed based on the three research questions of the study.

The interview questions kept the process focused, yet the flexibility of an open ended interview allowed for follow up questions. For example, the researcher asked the participants to elaborate on their answers to particular questions. Lofland and Lofland (1984) encourage modification of the interview guiding questions as the interview process proceeds through multiple participants. For this research, the guiding questions remained the same, with one exception; after the first interview, questions concerning active duty military were no longer used. Removing active duty military from consideration in this study enabled the researcher to pursue a narrower and stronger focus on community college students who are veterans. Research concerning active duty students attending community colleges could be the topic of a future study.

“The interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world,” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). The strength of the interview process for this research was centered around the ability of the researcher to gain the participants’ insights on veterans’ education in a community college setting. Stake (1995) describes the interview as “the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). However, the strengths of interviewing for research purposes are balanced by a modicum of weakness. For example, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2006), “With semistructured interviews you are confident of getting comparable data across subjects, but you lose the opportunity to understand how the subjects themselves structure the topic at hand” (p. 105).

Although the success of the interview is dependent upon the skills of the researcher (Creswell, 2007), interviews provide participant perspectives that cannot be

obtained by other methods. Moreover, interviews are the underpinning of qualitative research. Creswell aptly states, “Of all the data collection sources . . . interviewing and observation deserve special attention because they are frequently used in all five of the approaches to [qualitative] research. Entire books are available on these two topics” (p. 132).

### *Focus Group*

The interview process for this study culminated with a focus group. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “focus groups have been used to elicit and validate collective testimonies” (p. 648). Johnson and Christensen (2004) define a focus group as “a type of group interview in which a moderator . . . leads a discussion with a small group of individuals . . . to examine, in detail, how the group members think and feel about a topic” (p. 185). However, unless the moderator is skilled at maintaining the focal point on the phenomenon of interest, a positive group dynamic can be lost (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). For example, some group members may inhibit the participation of others by dominating the conversation, or important information that is embarrassing might not be readily shared (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

In this study the focus group was utilized to elicit dialogue from participants who offered varying perspectives of the phenomenon. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007),

[Focus groups] are particularly useful when the topic to explore is general, and the purpose is either to stimulate talk from multiple perspectives from the group participants so that the researcher can learn what the range of views are, or to promote talk on a topic that informants might not be able to talk so thoughtfully about in individual interviews. Group participants can stimulate each other to articulate their views or even to realize what their own views are. (p. 109)

Johnson and Christensen (2004) further explain that the facilitator promotes group discussion by the use of open ended questions that stimulate “new ideas and creative concepts” (p. 185). Because there were three participants in the focus group who were active in the discussions and respectful of each other’s contributions, the facilitator only needed to use occasional open ended questions as probes and prompts to maintain the group’s focus on the phenomenon of interest.

### *Observations*

According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), a continuum exists that situates qualitative observation at any given time. Within the continuum, are four roles in which the researcher may participate: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and complete observer. For this study observations surrounding the interviews were used and the researcher was a participant as an observer. These observations were carefully recorded in the researcher’s field notes. As an example, one notation revealed that at the onset of one student participant’s interview, the student attempted to convince the researcher that he was completely satisfied with his educational experience as a veteran at the case institution. As the interview proceeded, the student became less concerned with impressing the researcher and converted to a more forthcoming and candid presentation of his experience at the case institution.

It should also be noted that the researcher’s experience of teaching community college classes had provided opportunities for informal observations of her students who are veterans and these observations contributed to developing probing questions, as well understanding and interpreting data collected through the interviews in this study. Based

on having had experience with a family member who suffered from PTSD due to multiple tours of duty in Iraq, the researcher was more sympathetic and emotionally connected to her students who were veterans. The professional rapport the researcher built with students who were veterans in her classroom provided an additional source of reflection. For example, one particular student who suffered a serious leg injury requiring weekly therapy had missed multiple classes. Unique and compelling circumstances such as these situated the researcher in a position to effectively communicate with veterans during the study's interview process and to be an informed observer. Yet, to avoid bias in the research, reflexivity was practiced and documented in the field notes.

Consistent with discussion in Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the observations in this study involved feelings and emotional reactions by the researcher that served as a gateway to further insight concerning the phenomenon of interest.

The researcher's feelings can be an important indicator of subjects' feelings and, therefore, a source for reflecting. They also can help formulate questions to get at subjects' experiences. In this sense, the observer's emotional reactions are a source for research hunches. If carefully sorted out, selectively presented, and appropriately expressed, they also can be a wonderful avenue for building rapport. . . . Becoming part of a group, after all, means that you can share insiders' reactions. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 102)

In summary, although the prior observations were not within the bounds of the research design, they are threaded into the research. Moreover, the interconnections among observations made during the interviews, informal classroom observations while teaching veterans, and personal experience informed interpretations of interviews used for this research.

### *Field Notes*

The literature on data recording and field notes is contradictory. While, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proclaim, “ Indeed, the advantages of field notes over recordings seems to us so great that we do not recommend recording except for unusual reasons, as, for example, legal protection” (p. 241). Patton (1990) strongly recommends the use of tape recorders. Lincoln and Guba (1985) think that insight is best achieved with the use of field notes. Yet, Leedy and Ormrod (1995) state that without the use of tape recorders, the researcher must heavily rely on memory and accuracy of note taking. For this study, interviews were digitally recorded and field notes were written. Bogdan and Biklen, (2007) aptly state,

The tape recorder misses the sights, smells, impressions, and extra remarks said before and after the interview. Fieldnotes can provide any study with a personal log that helps the researcher to keep track of the development of the project, to visualize how the research plan has been affected by the data collected, and to remain aware of how he or she has been influenced by the data. (p. 119)

Field notes are described as a written record of interpretation via the senses during the research process. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) emphasize the importance of researcher self awareness, as the interpretation of data is greatly influenced by “[researcher] behavior, assumptions and whatever else might affect the data that are gathered and analyzed. . . . You must be extremely aware of your own relationship to the setting and of the evolution of the design and analysis (p. 122).

### *Documents*

According to Creswell (2007), multiple sources of data are needed for the thick descriptive information of a good case study. Stake (1995) posits, “Almost every study

finds some need for examining newspapers, annual reports, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and the like. Gathering data by studying documents follows the same line of thinking as observing or interviewing” (p. 68). In this study, newspapers, online college reports, email, minutes of meetings, PowerPoint presentations, seminar handouts, and webinar transcriptions were reviewed.

### *Demographic Questionnaires*

For this research demographic questionnaires were used in order to widen the breadth of data interpretation. For example, the perspective of a particular group of participants may have been influenced by their position relative to education, previous military experience, job, or age. In order to account for the impact of factors such as these, a demographic questionnaire was utilized (see Appendixes D and E). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), one drawback to questionnaires is that participants may not return them; however, all questionnaires for this study were returned to the researcher.

In summary, the six data collection techniques used were interviews, a focus group, observations, field notes, documents and a demographic questionnaire. These varied data sources provided the means to discover the emergent themes of this study.

## Data Collection Procedures

### *Interview Procedures*

Creswell (2007) defines a *gatekeeper* as a person from whom the researcher must seek approval before entering a group or cultural site. For this research, access to the case study institution and participants was gained through the president of the community college who authorized the research and asked the director of grants to assist with

identifying participants who met the sampling criteria. Although the researcher was approached by the director of grants, the president of the college was indeed the gatekeeper for this research. The director of grants identified persons who fit the criteria for the faculty, staff, and administrator groups, in addition to referring the researcher to the director of planning and research, a grant writer, and a grant accountant who also contributed to participant selection by referral. The researcher selected the student participants by referral from faculty members who were informed about the study by the researcher. Students also volunteered to be a part of the study upon learning about the research from others.

Participants were contacted by telephone to provide them with information on the study and invite their participation in the research. Information included a basic review of the study's purpose and the questions the research was attempting to answer. Potential participants were additionally informed of the time commitment required of them. One week prior to the interview, those who agreed to participate received an e-mail with three attachments: the interview questions (see Appendixes A, B, and C), a demographic survey (see Appendixes D and E), and an informed consent (see Appendixes F and G). The e-mail requested that participants complete the demographic survey before the interview, read the informed consent, and peruse the interview questions. The participants also were asked to suggest a convenient time and place for the interview, and subsequently, an appointment was mutually agreed upon by the researcher and the participant. Most of the interviews were conducted in the researcher's office or the participant's office.

When participants arrived for the interview, they were greeted in a manner that made them feel comfortable. A few minutes were spent in light conversation in order to have a feeling of relaxation on the part of the researcher and the participant. Before commencing the formal interview, two copies of the informed consent letter were signed, with the participant keeping one and the second returned to the researcher. The formal interview began with an interview protocol briefing (see Appendix H) where the participant was (a) reminded of items presented in the informed consent, (b) asked to participate in follow up questions not listed on the interview guide, (c) asked if the interview could be recorded, and (d) asked if they had any questions for the researcher. At this time two digital recorders were turned on. Each interview was focused around the seven basic interview questions with probes and prompts used to elicit further understanding of the participants' perspectives. Additionally, field notes were taken during the interview process.

The open ended interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. The formal interview closed with an interview protocol debriefing (see Appendix I) where the participant was (a) asked if they wanted to share any more information, (b) asked if there were any questions they would like the researcher to answer, and (c) encouraged to contact the researcher if there was anything to add in answering the interview questions. The participant was thanked for participating in the research.

Shortly after the interview the researcher reviewed and added information to the field notes regarding the mood and physical space where the interview occurred. The three main aspects the researcher observed and recorded as data when writing field notes

were: (a) the level of comfort and rapport achieved between researcher and participant, (b) the willingness of the participant to share information that situated the case study institution in a favorable or unfavorable light, and (c) the participant's willingness to share personal experiences that offered rich context to his or her answers to the study's questions. The digital recording of the interview was promptly e-mailed by attachment to the transcriptionist and then reviewed by the researcher.

#### *Focus Group Procedure*

Focus group participants were selected by referral from faculty members who were informed about the study by the researcher. Ten potential participants were contacted by e-mail to provide them with information on the study and invite their participation in the research. Information included a basic review of the study's purpose and the questions the research was attempting to answer. They were informed of the time commitment required for participation in the focus group and presented with four different dates, each with three different times. The email requested that the potential participants indicate their interest in participating in the focus group and, if interested, to choose three date-time combinations from the list. Based on the responses, the researcher determined an appropriate date and time to conduct the focus group.

Although the literature generally suggests that somewhere between six and 10 participants be used for focus groups, three worked well in this study. A faculty, student, and staff representative were the focus group participants and the researcher was the facilitator. The focus group was conducted in a student lounge adjacent to the researcher's office and snacks were provided. Before starting, two copies of the informed

consent letter were signed, with the participant keeping one and the second returned to the researcher. The focus group began with a protocol briefing (see Appendix H) where the participants were (a) reminded of items presented in the informed consent, (b) asked if the session could be recorded, and (c) asked if they had any questions for the researcher before beginning. The focus group session was not recorded as one of the participants objected to having an audio record of his comments. Seven basic questions had been prepared (see Appendix C); however, the dynamics of the group were such that conversation flowed and covered the questions without directly asking them. Probes and prompts were sparsely utilized, as the discussion was lively and focused on the issue of interest for the research study. Field notes were taken during the focus group and captured direct quotes.

The focus group lasted two and one half hours and closed with a protocol debriefing (see Appendix I). Each participant was thanked for their contribution to the focus group. Immediately following the interview the researcher reviewed and added information to the field notes regarding the mood and physical space where the interview had taken place.

### Ethical Considerations

There were three philosophical considerations that underpinned the ethics of this research. The first was *Kant's Categorical Imperative* which states that "humanity should be treated as an end and never as a means" (Munson, 2004, p. 754). The second is *Kant's Perfect Duty* in which the principal of autonomy mandates the maintenance of the "integrity and wholeness of a person" (Munson, 2004, p. 754). The third is *Kant's*

*Imperfect Duty* which can only be performed in certain instances such as improving the welfare of humans (Munson, 2004). In addition, Leedy and Ormrod's (2005), categorical issues were factored into the design of the study: "Most ethical issues in research fall into one of four categories: protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues" (p. 101). This section examines the way in which each of these issues has been addressed.

Preceding commencement of the study, Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB) approval was obtained. In order to insure protection from harm the participants were informed of their right to cease the interview at any time. An introductory interview protocol including a briefing and debriefing section, informed participants of their right of refusal (see Appendixes H and I). Right of refusal protects the participants from enduring any "unusual stress, embarrassment, or loss of self-esteem" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 101) that might have unintentionally occurred during the interview process in this study.

Informed consent is a requirement whereby the researcher is obligated to provide participants with the research details to the extent that the participant may not wish to participate (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Creswell (2007) more specifically states, "[The researcher] explains the purpose of the study, and does not engage in deception about the nature of the study" (pp. 141-142). The informed consent forms were signed before commencing individual (see Appendix F) and focus group (see Appendix G) interviews.

According to Creswell (2007), “A researcher protects the anonymity of the informants, for example, by assigning numbers or aliases to individuals. A researcher develops case studies of individuals that represent a composite picture rather than an individual picture” (p. 141). For this study alphanumeric identifiers were used on all documents in place of participants’ names to maintain confidentiality. Also, signed confidentiality forms were obtained from the professional who transcribed the audio recordings into data text and from peers who reviewed the research (see Appendixes J and K). All data including documents, field notes, digital recordings, transcripts, and discs are kept in a securely locked cabinet.

#### Data Analysis Procedures

For this study, Creswell’s (2007) data analysis spiral was used in order to interconnect data collection and processing which allows the researcher to develop insights through a progressive understanding of the data and phenomenon. The data analysis spiral consists of four main repeating procedures: (a) managing data in organized files or units; (b) reading, writing notes, and reflecting; (c) descriptively classifying and interpreting data contextually by comparisons and category formation; and (d) visualizing the data by some form of representation such as a matrix or tree (Creswell, 2007).

The data were managed by organizing the transcripts, documents, and demographic surveys into three separate computer folders. Following data organization each of the transcripts, documents, and demographic surveys were printed and read several times. Memos regarding ideas and concepts were hand written in the margins of each to facilitate examining of the database. The research questions were used as initial

categories for cutting and pasting related quotes, words in quotes, and concepts found in the transcripts, documents, and demographic surveys. There were seven folders; six were labeled with one of the research questions and the seventh was labeled as *other*. An alphanumeric identifier was used to indicate the information source (participant or document that provided the quote or idea). For example, in place of a student's name an alphanumeric identifier would be S1 indicating student number one. For each category, emergent themes were identified, coded, and placed in subfolders. Thick and interpretive descriptions of the data were written during the process of identifying and coding emergent themes. A tabular presentation of the data was then developed to holistically present the categories and subcategories in an organized manner.

This data analysis process was consistently open to new and emerging themes that developed as the analysis progressed. Creswell (2007) appropriately says that preconfiguration of codes contributes to confining research analysis in such a way as to stifle discovery of pertinent themes buried in the data. However, Creswell (2007) further clarifies his position on coding by stating,

These codes [categories] can:

- represent information that researchers expect to find before the study;
- represent surprising information that researchers did not expect to find;
- and represents [*sic*] information that is conceptually interesting or unusual to researchers (and potentially participants and audiences). (p. 153)

The organization of the research data into categories fostered pattern recognition.

“Aggregation is a process of abstracting generalities from particulars, of looking for patterns characteristic of most of the pieces of data” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 110).

The number of categories was limited so as to ease the transition to the five or six themes

recommended by Creswell (2007) who admonishes, “Researchers who end up with 100 or 200 categories—and it is easy to find this many in a complex database—struggle to reduce the picture to the five or six themes that they must end with for most publications” (p. 152).

The fluidity of Creswell’s (2007) spiral analysis is consistent with Stake’s (1995) assessment of data analysis:

There is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations. Analysis essentially means taking something apart. We take our impressions, our observations, apart. . . . Analysis goes on and on. (p. 71)

For this study the analysis began as themes that were recognized early in the research process and continued throughout the entire study.

### Validity, Reliability, and Transferability

#### *Validity*

This section explores the utility of the study as it relates to validity, reliability, and transferability. According to Merriam (1988),

[For research] to have any effect on either the theory or the practice of education, these studies must be believed and trusted; they need to present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, educators, and other researchers. . . . The applied nature of educational inquiry thus makes it imperative that researchers and others be able to trust the results of research—to feel confident that the study is valid and reliable. (pp. 163-164)

Creswell’s (2007) examination of the concept of validation in the literature reveals a spectrum of importance ranging from distraction to essential. However, the interconnectedness of the researcher and the study explains how trust is the foundation of internal validity and indicates its importance (Merriam, 1988; Merriam & Simpson,

2000). For this research, Merriam's (1988) view of validity is used: "What is being observed are people's constructions of reality, how they understand the world" (p. 167).

In order to portray an accurate account of a participant's story, Creswell (2007) suggests using multiple validation strategies including data triangulation and peer review. For this study data triangulation was used to substantiate the meaning of results from interviews, surveys, and document reviews. Participants were asked to verify or make revisions to the transcriptions. Peer reviews were used to corroborate the researcher's interpretation of the results.

### *Reliability*

Because the purpose of qualitative research is to describe and explain a phenomenon, reliability in the sense of reproducibility is problematic due the unpredictable nature of human behavior (Merriam, 1988). Therefore, the best approach is to design the study in a way that clearly delineates the research process. Yin (1994) aptly states, "Conduct research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder. . . . so that an auditor could repeat the procedures" (p. 37). Throughout this chapter, each aspect of the research design and step in the data collection and analysis processes have been described in detail.

### *Transferability*

Stake (1995) shows a preference for the term *interpretation* over *generalization* when referring to transferability of qualitative research results. " [In qualitative inquiry] we emphasize placing an interpreter in the field to observe the workings of the case, one who records objectively what is happening but simultaneously examines its meaning and

redirects observation to refine or substantiate those meanings” (Stake, pp. 8-9). In order for knowledge to be transferable, an understanding of the context in which the study’s results were acquired, as well as the context of the setting to which the results will be applied requires a reflective lens (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, transferability is supported in this study by applying Merriam’s (1988) technique of writing “rich thick descriptions” (p. 177), because it is the reader who determines whether findings and recommendations can be transferred to their institution or situation.

In summary, useful qualitative research requires (a) spending enough time in the field and employing rigorous data collection techniques (Creswell, 2007); (b) ensuring that all steps in the research process are operational (Yin, 1994); and (c) ensuring consistency in the results from data collected (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). For this research, the data collection techniques included planned and consistent participant interviews, careful analysis of documents, and rigorous field notes which contributed to validity. Triangulation strengthened the validity and reliability of the study and rich thick description helped with transferability. According to Goetz and LeCompte (as cited in Merriam, 1988), an explanation of assumptions and theory underpinning the study, the social context of the study, reasons for choosing the study participants, and detailed descriptions of participants also are critical components of valid and reliable research. This study includes all of these elements. The next section explores the limitations of this study.

### Limitations

The primary limitation of this research is that, as a single case study, the results can not be generalized. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), the major weakness of the case study method is the inability to generalize findings. However, the purpose of this research was to gain insights into the phenomenon that may inform other community colleges through transferability, and not to develop a universal theory or model. A second limitation related to qualitative research is the potential for researcher or participant bias. Several measures were taken to guard against bias including reflexivity, multiple data sources, and triangulation.

### Summary

This chapter explained the qualitative case study design that was used to examine the phenomena of interest—the needs of veterans who are community college students and community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs.

The research involved six data collection techniques: (a) interviews, (b) a focus group, (c) observations, (d) field notes, (e) document reviews, and (f) demographic questionnaires. The case study institution was selected because it offered data rich opportunities for addressing the research questions, was interested in the study, and allowed the researcher excellent access. The participants, who were purposively chosen using criterion sampling, included current and former students and college employees.

Creswell's (2007) data analysis spiral began with examining the database and writing memos in the margins. The research questions served as initial categories for

organizing the database and subcategories enabled coding of the data sources. A table was used to further analyze the categories and subcategories for the study.

Moreover, multiple validation strategies including data triangulation and peer reviews were implemented. A clear delineation of the research process ensured reliability of the study. Transferability of this study is dependent upon the reader situating the findings contextually to fit another institution; therefore, rich thick description is provided in the next chapter that discusses the study's findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the study by answering the three research questions and addressing other aspects of the study's purpose, which was to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs. The first section of this chapter provides a detailed description of the case study institution, focusing on features that are essential to understanding and transferring the results of the research.

#### Case Study Background

Approximately 1300 veterans attend the case institution, which is a public suburban single campus and coeducational community college serving approximately 50 communities within the district. The total credit and noncredit student head count for 2009 was slightly less than 30,000. Females comprise 55% of the student body. The average age of a student attending the college is 30 years and the mode is 19. The predominant ethnic group is Caucasian followed by Hispanic (13%), Asian (11%), Black (6%), and other (3%). Full time enrollment (FTE) is at 33% while 67% of the student body is enrolled on a part time basis. The majority of the students are registered for credit courses.

Most students at the college intend to earn an Associate's Degree, primarily an Associate in Arts (A. A.), but some seek an Associate in Science (A.S.) or an Associate in General Studies (A.G.S.) degree. Eleven percent of the student population is enrolled at the college in English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), or

General Education Development (GED) programs. The remainder of the student population falls into a transfer category of undecided (4%), transfer other (2%), or attending to upgrade job skills only (2%).

### *Staff Overview*

The number of staff at the college is approximately 3,000 including faculty, administrators, classified staff, and student aids. There are nearly 300 full time faculty, 1000 part time faculty, 12 counselors, and 13 librarians serving the district's college. Nearly 30% of full time faculty have a doctoral degree, 65% have a master's degree, and 6% have a bachelor's or less.

### *Campus Services, Clubs, and Organizations*

The college lists approximately 30 student and college services including the veterans' certification benefits function. In addition, the college provides space for a Veterans Services Office (VSO) belonging to a state agency, which offers a range of assistance to veterans at the college.

### *Participant Profiles*

Semistructured interviews were conducted with 10 participants who were from the case institution. Three of the student participants were current community college students at the time of the interviews. One of the participants was a former community college student at the case institution. The three administrators interviewed were a division dean, a vice president, and a president. Two faculty members (one was a former administrator) and one staff member also were interviewed. In order to protect the identities of the participants, their profile data is not revealed.

Based on the objection of one participant, focus group demographic data were not collected. The identity of all participants has been protected in three ways: (a) each participant's name is replaced by a code throughout the study; (b) references to gender are not necessarily accurate, thus pronouns may not match the participants; and (c) demographic data for faculty, staff, and administrators have been used carefully to protect the identity of the institution and the nonstudent participants. Although knowing and understanding the participants' perspective is important, the researcher placed a high priority on fulfilling the promise of confidentiality. For example, when particularly sensitive information was shared, referring to the participant as simply a *nonstudent* masked the participant's position at the institution. The next three sections of the chapter present findings that answer each of the research questions.

Response to Research Question 1: What do Veterans Perceive their Needs to be at the  
Community College?

Although the research question focused specifically on the veteran's perceptions of their own needs, in order to gain a richer description and understanding of veterans' needs in the community college context, a more holistic view was required. Therefore, the perspectives of participants other than veterans also have been included in the development of findings related to this research question. Five major themes emerged from the data during the analysis process: (a) credit streamlining; (b) streamlining of programs and services; (c) faculty, advisor, and counselor training; (d) difficulties encountered by veterans, and (e) factors that constitute a veteran friendly campus. Linkages among the five themes make it necessary to present them in an integrated way.

Thus, in order to holistically view the needs of veterans, their programs and services should be viewed with consideration of the difficulties they encounter as well as the factors that make their environment veteran friendly. For example, if feelings of isolation were identified as a difficulty veterans encounter, then a holistic view of the issue would demand consideration of specific attitudes in relation to programs and services, or lack thereof, that could be affecting such feelings. In addition, the findings are reported from the viewpoint of benefits to the institution and benefits to the students who are veterans using Rendon's theory of validation as the theoretical lens.

A definition of each major theme is presented separately; however, to pursue a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, the relationships of the themes to one another are discussed. For example, the first part of this section defines credit streamlining, followed by the participants' perspectives and the theme's relationship to the other four themes. Table 2 shows the interrelationships among themes and subthemes that address the first research question.

### *Credit Streamlining*

Credit streamlining can be defined as the ease of processing military experience and prior coursework toward a student's credits at the case institution. The case institution is a member of Servicemember Opportunity Colleges (SOC), which is a consortium of nearly 1800 national higher education entities that agree to principles of flexibility regarding course transfer and acceptance of nontraditional credit.

*Servicemember Opportunity Colleges.* According to Military.com (2009), SOC criteria for membership specifically suggests that members (a) avoid coursework

Table 2

*Interrelationship Among Themes and Subthemes That Address Research Question One*

|   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Credit streamlining   | Program and services streamlining   | Faculty, adviser, and counselor training   | Difficulties veterans face  | Veteran friendly environment  |
| Adherence to SOC principles promotes ease of credit transfer and promotes the campus as veteran friendly            | Cohort model is linked to addressing difficulties faced when taking classes with nonveterans  | Sensitivity training increases faculty and counselor awareness of difficulties veterans face   | Dealing with immature classmates circumvented by implementing the cohort model for veterans       | Promoted by validation of students accomplishments through easing restrictions on credit transfer |
| Credit transfer flexibility requires veteran specific advisors who are aware of the difficulties veterans encounter | Veterans' center promotes campus as veteran friendly and offers a <i>one stop shop</i> for students, easing military to civilian transition | Training for PTSD and related disorders facilitates faculty and counselor understanding of difficulties veterans face and portrays the college as veteran friendly | PTSD issues can be diffused by training counselors and faculty to recognize symptoms              | Promoted by a <i>one stop shop</i> veterans' center   |
|   |   |  | Lack of sensitivity by faculty and counselors addressed through training                          | Promoted by sensitivity training for faculty and counselors                                       |
|   |   |  | Credit transfer problems can be addressed by adhering to SOC principles that ease credit transfer | Promoted by training seminars for the recognition of PTSD and related disorders                   |

duplication, (b) avoid loss of previously earned credits, (c) recognize the American Council of Education (ACE) Guide for evaluating military experiential learning, and (d) award credit to testing programs such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support (DANTES), DANTES Standardized Subject Tests (DSST), and Excelsior College Examinations (ECE). The SOC assists in coordinating educational opportunities for servicemembers, acts as a liaison between the military and higher education, and advocates for program flexibility for servicemembers. According to Military.com (2009),

College credit examinations are widely accepted by colleges and universities. By passing these examinations, you may earn one-third or more of the credits required for a college degree. These examinations are available in more than 150 subject areas and are similar to end-of-course tests offered by colleges and universities. The American Council on Education (ACE) recommends college credit for [many] credit-by-examination programs. (¶ 1)

Students come to higher education with the expectation that their prior military experiences and coursework will articulate with the college curriculum. S3 offered his perspective on credit transfer.

When I was recruited they were always saying that all the on the job training that you do will transfer to any college that you go to. Maybe that's a selling point. . . . They are selling free education and your training will be included as part of your credits, so you're not just wasting your time.

It is important to veterans attending the case institution that credit be given for military experiential learning, military coursework, and prior coursework from other institutions not only to expedite program completion, but to validate the student. Administrator number 1 (A1) explained how an advisor would counsel a veteran and how the case institution needs trained employees in order to commit to SOC principles.

The way it's supposed to work is a veteran would show up here – or not even a veteran, a soldier. They don't have to be out of the service, they could be stationed here or a veteran; doesn't matter. Shows up with 10 transcripts of all these schools they've gone to in the last 10 years and what is supposed to happen is the advisor who understands this system and who one would hope is committed to helping veterans, sits down with them, does an interview, and then spends some time alone with these ACE guides doing the evaluation. It's not hard to do, but you have to be trained to do it, because the books are large and it's not a transparent system. . . . But after four hours of training, you can do a pretty decent job at it. At any rate, the advisor goes through – the soldier provides an official transcript, both of their college courses and of their military training and the advisor then puts it on a worksheet, because you know there can't be duplication, but ends up with a worksheet that shows it looks like you've got so many credits toward a degree. Well, it's important to follow the Service Member Opportunity Guidelines, because the whole idea of this is for people to get the most credit they have coming to them. Not that they didn't earn, but that they have coming to them. No military person should have to take a course on first aid. That just should never happen. They should get credit for that and then in their training somewhere that credit is buried. It's things like that. It all depends what you studied.

Although the case institution is a member of SOC, there is only one person who is acutely aware of the how the SOC principles, ACE guidelines, and credit transfer benefit veterans. The extent to which the SOC principles are implemented at the case institution is nebulous; however, the desire for improvement was evident in Administrator 2's (A2) comment:

We do use ACE. I don't know how much we use DANTES. I don't know if we've ever formalized the credit transfer from the DANTES list. We might have, I just don't know. But if we haven't, we need to; and if we have that's wonderful. Credit for prior learning should really be much more active for both veterans as well as active duty. . . . But for the veteran, I think one can set up a system here that can make that happen much more quickly than it probably does, credit for prior learning.

The vague understanding of SOC principles among employees at the case institution was again demonstrated by the dialogue between A1 and the researcher. Additionally, the

dialogue sets the stage for how a prospective student considers which institution he or she will attend.

A1: Every Army soldier can go into any Army Education Center, wherever they are stationed and there is an education counselor there who has these books and who can, in fact, tell them here's what you've got and here's what you should get when you leave the Army. Where are you going? Well most soldiers are either going home or they are . . . where they are ending up. Alright, in that area, here are the colleges that have agreed to do this thing. Which of these are near there? "Oh, look, it's [case institution], yeah that's not far from where I live, I could go there." They can look up what the deal is, so when they show up here they are confident, [case institution] has signed up for this thing and I won't have to start over. I won't have zero.

Researcher: And what do they find when they get here?

A1: Here, they are going to get zero. I've had veterans tell me that they can't get their CLEP Test accepted and that's a pretty standard American way of earning credit is CLEP Testing.

Researcher: Alright. . . say [case institution] is a place where a veteran can attend, when they come here you feel as though they [A1 interrupts]

A1: The stories I hear [are] that their credits are not being accepted, either from other schools they attended or from military training.

Moreover, in his statement, "To realize that our military students are adult students, that they have learned some things while they were in the military, that their training was of value," A1 connected the ease of credit transfer to validation of the student. Laura Rendon's (1994) theory, which correlates the success of Hispanic students with involvement and validation, has practical application to the education of veterans as well. It is reasonable to infer that students who are veterans have a need for validation just like any other cohort of students. In her theory, Rendon describes the role validation plays in giving students the confidence needed to realize their innate desire to learn.

*Credit transfer difficulties.* Because the case institution advisors are generalists, there are no advisors that are veteran specific nor are there any credit transfer specialists.

Prior student 1 (PS1) explained,

I had a lot of PE credits that came and [case institution] took them. Depending on what field you're in. I had an A&P credit because I was a medic. So it really just would depend on whatever training you received in the military and what would transfer over. I know when I visited the advising office they had a hard time trying to decide what those credits were and what they would apply to. So I don't know if there are any specialized training advisors to know about it. . . . articulation I think is the word.

A1 passionately narrated the difficulties veterans encounter with credit transfer and poignantly stated how this disadvantages the institution.

So, when veterans show up at places like this and lay their stuff out, I hear stories like, "They told me none of my credits were any good", or, "none of the stuff I have will apply toward a degree here." Well, that's just plain wrong. That's just plain wrong. So until you have an environment where there are people who understand and people who are solicitous of the well being of veterans it will never be an environment where a veteran will want to be because who would want to go to a school where you'd have to start over when you could go to another school and you'd be 30 credits down the road. I mean that's just crazy.

Although less forceful, A2 concurred with A1 as he stated, "For the serving soldier . . . I already think for them it's more a matter of credit transfer, which means, by the way, we have to do a much better job with [it]."

Further evidence of credit transfer difficulties affecting the well being of the case institution was presented by A1.

Even if you do the math and you end up having to pay [an] out of district rate to another school, let's just say, for example, that [community college XYZ] was more veteran friendly. Well, even if you were out of district it would make more financial sense to go there if you were 30 credits ahead. So we are not doing ourselves any favors in these days of dwindling enrollment by turning our backs on a group of people that not only have earned our consideration, but who bring with them not only a lot of experience and education, but some money, in terms

of veteran's benefits. We're just shooting ourselves in both feet by not welcoming these people with open arms.

Institutions of higher learning need to invite veterans as a special population of students. Although the benefit is clear, the college may not yet have realized the implications of benefits veterans bring to an institution. Moreover, the college has made increasing enrollment a priority.

Veterans want to know how their military experience translates into credit.

Student number 1 (S1) explained how he had benefited from speaking with the Veterans Administration counselor; however, no one from the case institution had informed him about credit for military experiential learning.

Because a lot of my vet benefits I found out was going through the VA meeting with the counselor at the VA, but I never really met with anybody at the community college level. Also, what I'm finding out is a lot of your military experience counts toward college credit; some of your experience. And it would be nice to know what experience counts towards college credit.

When offering a suggestion for nationwide standardized credit, S3 showed that he was unaware of the SOC principles to which the case institution has pledged.

I know that [case institution] did not accept all my CCAF [Community College of the Air Force] credits, but I can understand because all colleges have standards that need to be met, but if there is a way to unify all the credits earned in the military to be up to standard for all the community colleges across the US. . . . My comment that I was making when I was looking at it [the interview question] was if there was a standardized – all the branches of the service would have some sort of standard. If you accomplish this program it doesn't matter. Nationwide, you could go to any community college it would be a standard that those credits would all transfer over.

S3's comment about a nationwide standard described the SOC. A more liberal application of SOC principles at the case institution as well as transparency of the credit transfer process may have resulted in quite a different scenario for this student.

S3 continued as he explained how military experiential training and coursework did not count toward his associate degree.

I can't recall, but I think it's more like on the job training compared to a sit down class course that was offered by [the military]. . . . Basically you go to school for whatever job that you've got to be doing in the military. I was what you call food services as part of food, lodging and transportation in the Air Force. They [case institution] accepted my food [classes], like food sanitation classes. They gave me credit for those, but, obviously it really doesn't go toward my associates' degree.

S3 extended his lament beyond his personal experience when he stated, "Because I know it's all this pick and choose, a lot of it. My friend [was] pretty much denied most of his credits."

Veterans' frustration with the lack of coursework articulation is evident as S3 told how he had to take three classes at the case institution where the material covered was a repeat of his lengthy and comprehensive military classes.

Well, as in they were like well, it really doesn't matter. You've got to take – that really is nothing to us so – that's basically you know you get credits from boot camp and whatever technical school you went to. Technical schools are 3 months to 6 months. Some of them are almost a year long, Monday through Friday and if you're learning about something that should apply; but again, if you are specifically getting a degree in that thing. But at my technical school they had a lot of problem solving, also leadership. They had a whole week of classes on leadership. You offer the management classes here. I think you also offer the leadership. I think I got the certification from [case institution] by taking three classes. There was one business, one management and the third one was supervision. By taking those three classes I got a certification from [case institution] that I'm a certified supervisor. But I mean I had pretty much done similar sort of classes in the military. . . . It doesn't show up on the transcript.

Education is the underpinning of military culture; however, many in the civilian world, including educators, lack an appreciation for the classroom and experiential learning that occurs during enlistment. A nonstudent participant, who the researcher will not identify

by code in order to preclude identification of her position at the case institution explained,

I remember going through the interview process here [blank] years ago and I encountered many people who were openly skeptical that the military does anything that would be worthwhile regarding education. They just don't know and they are inclined to believe "no." No, they know nothing about it. But the military does a huge education effort around the world. I mean, where there are military people, there's an educational program. . . . There are only a few things you can do that are positive for yourself when you are fenced in and you can't go anywhere. So you can work out at the gym, they do that; you can go to the rec. center and become a ping pong expert and a billiard expert and play darts or you can go to school, because wherever service members are stationed, there is going to be an education element. You can go to school. . . . There is a real culture of moving forward with yourself.

Faculty 2 (F2) lends credence to the liberal application of SOC principles as he confirmed nonstudent participant's view of education in the military.

A good deal of military training is aimed at personal development. When I say personal development, I mean things like communication skills, writing skills, math skills and in order to gain promotion within the military, for the most part, you have to pursue education.

According to A1, a stumbling block to the liberal application of SOC principles at the case institution is a lack of understanding and respect in academe for education offered by the military. A1 stated:

The problem is most colleges and universities are not military friendly, because they are, and I'm not saying this critically, they are havens of liberal thought. I am a liberal myself, even though I have military background. But I have felt, many times, the lack of acceptance of military experience at this college; in many forms. I have had many of my colleagues tell me they can't imagine that anything I did as a military educator would have any application here at the college. They can't imagine that I learned anything in thirty years as an education administrator for the military that would be applicable here. Well, they just don't get it; because 90% of it is applicable, but they don't want to get it because they want to believe that there are no worthwhile education things occurring within the Department of Defense, when it's in fact the largest educational enterprise in the world.

A1 further discussed barriers that impede credit transfer at the case institution. He pointed to the mandatory fraction of credits that are required to be from the case institution in order to graduate. A1 also identified the issue academics have with granting a degree to a student who has only taken electives at the case institution. His argument was that the transient lifestyle of the military is counterintuitive to the rigidity of the case institution's practice of restricting the transfer of veterans' credits.

The veteran or soldier must complete at least one fourth of the total credits for the degree at this institution if we are going to grant a degree. So if we're going to grant a 60 hour Associate Degree, at least 15 hours have to be completed here at the [case institution]. But you can understand where many of the pure academics would stumble with this. Let's say, for example, we would have to agree that [community college ABC's] English 101 is as good as ours. [Community college XYZ's] 101 is as good as ours. Everyone who is a member of this is as good as ours. That's one stumbling block. The other stumbling block is what if the veteran has taken all the hard courses? . . . In theory, if we sign up for this the veteran could take those 15 semester hours of electives here and we would issue a degree. Well, some academics stumble over that because they think the person ought to do their capstone courses. But it doesn't work that way because people move around in the military. You've got to harvest where the wheat is growing.

As students look to the case institution for validation of their military learning experiences, they are finding a paucity of recognition for their prior efforts. Nonstudent participant continued to explain why education is pivotal for promotion in the military.

In fact, in the [specific military branch], if you don't go to school, you are disadvantaged when it comes to promotion, because in the aggregate, if you look at soldier records, they all look the same. They promote people by the grade they are in like from E5 to E6. . . . All the E5's have had basic training, they have all had advanced individual training, they've had the basic NCO course, they've all had it. . . . So how do you differentiate the stellar one from the not so stellar one? They all probably have pretty decent ratings or they wouldn't be in, but you look for things like education. That's what sets people apart. Hey, this guy has taken 20 courses, this guy has taken none. Well, that's a no brainer. Who are you going to promote first? You are going to promote the guy who is doing his education on his own. It shows responsibility, shows us someone we want to keep in the

[specific military branch] somebody you want to recognize. So it permeates the entire culture, not so different for officers.

S3 supports nonstudent participant's perspective as he explained how military coursework for writing performance evaluations should have been credited.

Yeah, you've got your supervisor and five other people that work with you sitting in that classroom pretty much all day and then you have the subject for today is where you guys are going to learn how to write reviews, since you are a supervisor now. . . . And again, those credits don't transfer over when they are showing that – same thing that they talk about and my supervision class like when you give reviews you want to make people feel comfortable and things of that nature; same thing that they teach but for about a week in the class, 8 hours every day, should get some sort of credit.

One way that credit transfer at the case institution could be streamlined would be to provide specialized training for counselors and advisors that is veteran specific. A specific rather than the current general approach to advising veterans would benefit this nontraditional group of students. PS1 provides insight as she stated:

Having an adviser specifically for veterans or active duty, because I think that being able to advise them for their future career is going to be different than you would advise the traditional age [student], especially depending on what you go into and especially because a lot of the veterans have military credits that will count toward their degree.

When asked how the community college could better meet the needs of veterans in the next 10 years, F2 proposed collaboration between the community college and the military. He recommended going beyond a DAN TES credit transfer agreement and suggested bringing some of the military training to the community college.

This is a question that I kind of want to answer at a pretty high level of abstraction. Maybe I can pull it down a little bit. At the very high level of abstraction I would say that I think one of the things that community colleges in general can do is create closer ties to the military services themselves and instead of just that sort of DAN TES articulation agreement, sort of list the courses that may or may not translate. I think there is a lot of opportunity for community

colleges to help provide not only the military training which would bring it sort of in-house, but also for the military training to gain credence and credit within the community college. . . . There is still that kind of divide between the training that they are getting as military and the training that they are getting as community college students. That divide doesn't need to be nearly as strong as it is, I don't think. I think it could go both ways.

### *Program and Services Streamlining*

Programs and services at the case institution are discussed using two subthemes, cohorts and veterans' center, within the context of (a) benefit to veterans, (b) difficulties encountered, (c) benefit to the institution, and (d) factors that constitute a veteran friendly campus. The data for program and services streamlining are viewed through the lens of Rendon's theory of validation.

*Cohort model.* The cohort model, which gives veterans an opportunity to experience their education as a learning community, is linked to addressing the difficulties veterans encounter when taking classes with nonveterans and accrued benefits for the college when veterans are in attendance. John Schupp (2009) developed the idea of veteran cohorts at Cleveland State University where veterans take their general education classes such as math, science, and English together. Faculty are selected for the cohorts based on their expressed interest in teaching veterans. The emphasis of the cohort model is on successfully transitioning veterans into the classroom. The Schupp model provides a framework for analyzing the data in this study, as participants either expressed a need for a veterans' learning community at the case institution or identified difficulties that veterans encounter which could be ameliorated by implementation of cohorts.

The idea of veterans being in class together was expressed by focus group student 1 (FGSt1), who excitedly proposed:

Find out if a student wants to be in a class with more vets. . . . [It is] nice to have all adults—hey! All military—maybe it'd be easier you know—gain friendship to help you get through school.

Although not directly quoted, due to one focus group member's unwillingness to allow digital recording, focus group staff 1 (FGSf1) suggested approaching the case institution's grant coordinator with a proposal for a veterans' cohort grant, which could pilot a study of special populations. FGSf1 was knowledgeable about available stimulus money for such a pilot study. Unaware of the Schupp model, she believed that a [case institution] model could be replicated across community colleges.

S2 offered the idea of having a community college for veterans, which is beyond the scope of this study, but her suggestion led to interview probes about the difficulties veterans encounter while taking classes with nonveterans. When the researcher questioned S2 about how the community college could better meet the needs of veterans during the next decade, she pointedly answered, "Actually, I think they should have a community college just for veterans." When questioned about difficulties she had encountered at the case institution, S2 responded, "My difficulties were dealing with the kids. . . . the other students are younger, fresh out of high school. . . . it was [an] annoyance . . . and they are arrogant [and] ignorant."

Student and nonstudent participants identified many difficulties veterans encounter while transitioning into the college classroom. For example, the isolation felt by veterans in their classes serves as a barrier to retention and completion of programs. F1 explained the lack of confidence veterans can experience upon returning to the classroom.

Veteran students are not fresh out of high school. They have been living in a very different environment, and they may be unsure about being back in school after a long layoff. Some of them even joined the military because they weren't enjoying or doing well in school. Now, four or five years removed from the classroom, they may be more unsure than ever.

A1 expressed his strong opinion on the feelings of isolation experienced by veterans as a problem in need of attention when he stated, "All they feel is isolated. They feel different as it is because of their experiences. Unless we can bring them in, they are going to continue to feel like outcasts in my opinion." Although A2 did not dispute the value of cohorts, he offered an informed perspective on the dichotomy of recognizing veterans' needs and recognizing them as a separate group of students when he stated, "There's quite a lot of literature about not treating veterans as a separate group. Absorb them into the college, don't identify them as separate."

Reasons for the sense of isolation felt by veterans include the comparatively unrestricted environment of the college classroom, the lack of solidarity with peers, and unique life experiences by virtue of having served in a war time military. F1 shared,

A veteran student recently told me that the first semester was the hardest for him. The lack of structure at college is very different from military life. Soldiers are used to focusing on points of agreement, holding back differences, to maintain unit cohesion. So in classrooms where discussing opposing points of view is expected, they don't know what to do. Some of us may engage our students in discussions of current events, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For men and women who served in these wars, they are not abstract issues; they are intensely personal. Veterans who have served in war zones, have lost friends in these wars, have killed people in these wars [and] will react very differently to discussions about wars and the military than students who are fresh out of high school.

S2 expressed her frustration with the comparatively unrestricted classroom environment commenting, "Some teachers just let kids walk all over them . . . that's

when I would step in actually and tell them to shut . . . up in class. . . . I think the kids these days are just vulgar.” PS1 offered an example of her negative experiences in the classroom with younger students:

I know I’ve had just experiences in the classes I’ve taken where younger students don’t really – they don’t know what’s going on. They don’t understand that not everyone in there is right out high school trying to go on to transfer somewhere. . . . There are things that are inflammatory or disrespectful maybe that – and it’s mostly students.

The following dialogue between the researcher and S2 explains the reasons why she felt frustrated in sharing the classroom with nonveterans:

S2: You can’t change the way the kids are. . . . When they see that they can walk all over the teacher, it’s all over. . . .

Researcher: Did you find that was harder to deal with from the beginning?

S2: Yeah. I was getting so annoyed. Yeah, I’ve heard the conversation. ‘I gotta come here to get my parents off my . . . pay for it, so I’ve gotta do something. I’ve gotta go to school.’ That was the conversation. Oh, it just made me hot. So, I’m paying for it, but his parents’ taxes are paying for it. . . . I’m trying to get as much as I can from this and they’re . . . I’m not used to . . . somebody who is talking you’d be talking too. No, you pay attention. Otherwise you’ll be doing pushups in the back. If you fall asleep you’ll be doing pushups in the back. So that was really annoying for me, dealing with this. I was in groups with such a young . . . ones.

*Veterans’ center.* A veterans’ center is a central space, with a designated director, that provides information and coordinates educational benefits, programs, and services. Employees who staff a veterans’ center collaborate with internal and external organizations and services for the purpose of charting the veterans’ education related processes. The case institution does not have a designated building, office, or coordinator for serving veterans. The central sources of information for educational benefits, programs and services are the Veterans’ Certifying Official (VCO) and the records office.

However, the case institution recently set aside space for a *veterans' service office* as part of the new college center currently under construction and scheduled to open in 2011.

The case institution has also recently provided an office for a Veterans' Service Officer (VSO). Unlike the future veterans' coordinator, the VSO is an employee of the Veterans' Administration (VA), not the case institution. The VSO office currently is located in a building separate from the VCO and the records office.

As shown in data collected for this study, from 2008 to 2009, the dynamic environment of the case institution and rapid development of state policies related to implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill have had an impact on veterans' programs and services. For example, the state has issued an unfunded mandate requiring those institutions serving 1000 or more students who are categorized as veterans to designate a coordinator of veterans and military personnel student services. The case institution will be filling the position by changing the title and job description of the current VCO.

The idea of establishing a veterans' center on the campus was explored by gaining the perspectives of administrators, staff, faculty, and students. A3 discussed the college's plans and the benefits of having a veterans' center.

A3: I would think that we would want to, as an institution, develop something of a Veterans' Affairs office and it would become a centralized place that would be clearly identified that would provide assistance to veterans, that would also have responsibility for help coordinating services both on campus and off campus for them. But just a recognizable space that centralizes things that is highly visible to them.

Researcher: Do you see that as becoming a reality for [this college]?

A3: I do. So much so that we are trying to work towards it as we work on the renovation of our space for the [name] and the [name] building, as we do our

planning for the student center is try to identify set aside space for a veterans affairs office. . . . They don't know what to do sometimes. 'Where do I take my paperwork? What does that entitle me to? How do I set the process in motion?'

Several participants indicated that a veterans' center space is integral to supporting students who are veterans as it provides a welcoming environment. FGSt2 expressed a desire for an office where veterans would feel comfortable: "What we need is a space." A2 concisely stated, "I think a one stop center is just very important for them." F1 shared a similar viewpoint when he explained,

If there was a centralized office where they could go to where they have all the things they need to do in one place and they could get information that is specific to them. I think that would go a long ways towards helping them and it would also go a long way towards making them feel welcomed here.

A veterans' center staffed with experts in veterans' education would, as stated by A3, enable the college to "do a better job in just mapping out a process for the veterans." Moreover, this type of center is important for the case institution as it lends credibility to a label of *veteran friendly*. A1 asserted that the case institution should emulate the Veterans' Administration (VA) and provide an institutional expert in veterans' education.

But we haven't established a welcoming environment for them; a place they can go to get their problems solved. OK, there's somebody over that helps them get their benefits. Ahhh, what does that mean? They help them fill out the forms and they will call the VA office if there is a problem? Well that's fine, but that's not enough. So there needs to be somebody there who gets it, just like there is at every VA hospital. That's a perfect example. That's their medical care. Well, we are their educational care. Where is the VA expert here? Is it just someone that they pointed at and said, "You. You help people fill out the forms". Well, that's not a VA assistance office. Colleges that do this well and are successful at it have a staff of two or three people who get it. They understand what it takes to help these students be successful. We are not there.

F1 confirmed the need for privacy as part of a centralized office arrangement when he explained the current situation at the case institution:

Having a centralized veteran's service office would go a huge way. I don't know if you've seen where [VCO] works, that's just not nearly adequate. That was designed back in the late 80's when there were very few veterans here at [case institution], pre Gulf War I and it was probably barely adequate at that point. But at this point it is not. She's [VCO] dealing with people who have got serious problems; financial problems, emotional problems and there is a need for privacy and a need for confidentiality that's just not taken care of there. . . . The school has in the new construction a veteran's services office, that's not the title of it, which is going to be put in which is great, but that's four years away before that building is going to be done. And that's assuming everything goes according to plan.

The need for a centralized location and services was expressed by FGS4 when she said, "If we had a center more students would disclose things like TBI. [We] need to identify with someone in the military like a VA counselor. . . . What we need is a space."

When asked what the most pressing needs of veterans are, Staff 1 (St1) succinctly stated, "They need to have a centralized location. A centralized location so that information that pertains to them can be assembled better." St1 explained how he came to his conclusions regarding the most pressing needs of veterans at the case institution. "Just from what I've seen other colleges do along with talking to the student veterans themselves about what we can do in order to improve the way we serve them." St1 agreed with F1's assessment on the need for a private space.

There are issues with that [the current] arrangement in itself because it doesn't allow for privacy matters to be talked about in a dignified way . . . because of the way the office is set up. It's very impersonal.

Moreover, St1 (a) explained how a veterans' center would benefit students, (b) connected a central location with the concept of a *veteran friendly* institution, and (c) recognized the benefit of external collaboration.

I think it [centralized location] will improve their understanding of the process. It would definitely be both more student friendly for them as well as veteran

friendly. With the new GI Bill coming there are a lot of questions about that and then I don't think it will allow us to take more advantage of the different resources that are outside the college that probably could be brought into the college in order to serve these students.

St1 explained how current models of serving special student populations and veterans at other institutions can be adapted to serving veterans at the case institution.

We've got wonderful models in the way we service international students, the way we service athletes. I don't see why we can't use some of those offices as models to create something – an office for student veterans. There are a lot of programs out there that are designed for veterans attending school that we can draw from.

With his focus directly on the students' needs at the present moment, St1 stated, "No matter how they decide to organize it, these young men and women need their own office in order to handle the business that they need to take care of. . . . I don't know why it's like this."

A veterans' center would not only afford a *one stop shop*, thereby eliminating confusion concerning where to find information and services, but it could potentially offer extended hours of service to meet the unique demographic profile of students who are veterans. PS1 explained,

Most returning vets are also employed so to have some of that flexibility and a lot of the services aren't open at night in the evening when they are here on campus. I know financial aid is open a little bit later on certain days, but records isn't.

F1 understood the urgency of a private space and a social space, but concomitantly accepted that the veterans' center concept is in the future for the case institution. F1 explained his vision of an interim veterans' center.

There is a need for privacy and a need for confidentiality that's just not taken care of. The school has in the new construction a veteran's services office . . . which is going to be put in which is great, but that's four years away before that building is

going to be done. And that's assuming everything goes according to plan. But, we could find a space for it, somewhere. . . . I'm trying to set up a meeting with [Dr. X] to talk to him . . . about getting that room set up. I'm going to say if we've got that, then we've got these places where we can . . . bring veterans in. . . . This veteran's services room is going to be on the second floor and [VCO] is going to have an office in the back and there's going to be an office in the front where he can have VA funded veteran work study people. . . . So we can have full time coverage there. We can have a veterans' service representative there at night when we have night students. There will be someone at that desk pretty much around the clock. The front office can also be a place where they can come in and get a cup of coffee and sit and relax and be around people with similar experiences.

From an institutional perspective, a highly visible veterans' center can promote the college as a *veteran friendly* campus. A2 described the various ways such a center could be publicized.

I think that one stop shop needs to be fairly public in terms of the visibility on the college's front face, whether it's the web, the catalog, the phonebook, signage on campus in the advertising of the school. I think people need to know that this is a veteran friendly place and that we have services here that can help you to connect back with the college, with the community and that needs to be a click away.

In addition to serving a promotional role, a veterans' center would expand the opportunity for the college to track its students who are veterans and aid student retention and completion. St1 explained,

I envision a lot of things taking place in this office . . . because here is the other thing; along with not tracking the number of student veterans that we have, we haven't put a lot of time into helping them succeed from day one to graduation.

FGS4, in agreement with St1, stated, "[case institution] needs streamlined services—no shuttling from office to office or town to town." Furthermore, the presence of a veterans' center could facilitate collaboration with nearby external mental health services. FGS4 has Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and described how far she has to travel for counseling. A nearby mental health facility has recently sought to establish a collaborative effort with

the case institution. Currently, the college does not provide mental health services, but does referrals to external providers.

Offices and programs serving veterans need to be centrally located and integrated. PS1 stated, “I think the fact that the IVG and GI Bill offices are separated. I think it’s just detrimental.” The veterans’ center concept is the focal point where programs and services for veterans are integrated. For example, benefit processing and veterans specific advising are two services that should be offered within proximate spaces. A2 stressed,

I think it starts with them understanding their benefits and processing their benefits with the community college. It’s not just the financial aid piece of it, that’s an important piece of it, but if they have disabilities they have access to rehab services, they have access to support for books and so on and then they have family issues, as well. So, what is the wide range of veteran support services provided either through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or the Illinois Department for . . . and how well are we as a community college, how literate are we about this and how do we help them and how good is the VA about informing them and about actually processing with their counselors and with their outreach people processing the benefits for the veterans? I think that amongst the other needs for the veterans, what the pressing needs are for them is very, very personalized counseling and advising.

Thus, in brief, the findings for the subtheme *veterans’ center* showed that the case institution is affected by state policies related to the Post 9/11 GI Bill. In addition, the participants affirmed the importance of having a centralized location where veterans could readily access veteran specific information and services related to educational processes.

#### *Faculty, Adviser, and Counselor Training*

Faculty, adviser, and counselor training at the case institution are discussed using two subthemes, sensitivity training and training for PTSD and related disorders within the

context of (a) benefit to veterans, (b) difficulties encountered, (c) benefit to the institution, and (d) factors that constitute a veteran friendly campus.

Counselors at the case institution assist students in (a) exploring career options and making decisions, (b) plotting an educational course if they are undecided, (c) developing success strategies if they are on academic probation, and (d) dealing with personal concerns that are obstacles to educational or career goals. The case institution advisers are divided into two categories, general or faculty adviser. First, a *general* adviser assists students with general course selection, transfer information, testing prerequisites, degree requirements, overload permits, college orientation, and graduation requirements. Second, a *faculty* adviser's role is to help students with course selection specific to their major; guide students toward completion of their general education requirements; answer prerequisite, transfer, and articulation questions; administer competency examinations; and provide information on transfer schools. All faculty are designated advisers at the case institution.

*Sensitivity training.* Participants thought that counselors and advisers should be trained to recognize, understand, and address problems that are unique to veterans. The counselors and advisers also need to understand that many of the veterans' problems arise in the classroom as a result of insensitivity and unsuitable pedagogy. With an emphasis on training, A2 stated,

If you don't understand what their particular needs are, then you are not going to be able to meet those needs and they might not be articulate about those needs. That's why I say given the larger number of veterans we need counselors, we need advisers. So the counselors should be trained in ferreting out those needs and then being sympathetic to what the possible experiences might have been.

Concurring with A2, FGF2 curtly proposed, “We need mandatory sensitivity training for faculty.”

A1 discussed the importance of faculty understanding the learning styles of veterans which he described as classic adult learners.

So, I think many professors are not prepared, trained or even necessarily inclined to want to consider that they have a group of learners in their classroom that learn differently. They are the classic adult learners. They will want to participate more. They will not want to be lectured to, they will want to be discussing more, they will want to do projects more than readings and tests, they will want to do practical exercises more than readings and tests and they probably may be more confident in wanting to negotiate with the instructor.

Although A1 described veterans as classic adult learners, as a group, veterans stand apart from other nontraditional students. Veterans can feel ostracized in the classroom when insensitive and negative comments by students and faculty are made toward them. For example, FGS4 shared, “It’s hard to walk into the classroom. Many students just quit after being so happy to come back [to school]. Teasing and peer pressure drive them away.” FGS4 told the focus group about an experience she had in the classroom when she arrived for class in uniform after work. A young female civilian student snidely commented that FGS4 should be ashamed of “killing babies.” FGS4 did not think that the comment would affect her; however, in fact, it had a very negative effect. FGF2 added, “Faculty sensitivity training is needed. Vets are asked patronizing questions like ‘You seem pretty smart. Why did you join the military then?’” Antimilitary bias on the part of some faculty negatively impacts students. F2 shared, “If the faculty attitudes are strongly antimilitary, the student is going to pick up on that, particularly the veteran students. They are going to clamp down and that won’t serve them well.” F2

viewed antimilitary bias as a form of discrimination and said that the bias of some faculty members is clearly manifested in the classroom.

Although faculty sensitivity training appears to be a rational approach for managing antimilitary bias in the classroom, it could potentially have a rebounding affect.

F2 explained the snare of addressing negative faculty attitudes toward veterans:

Where I probably would have tried to address it more openly and formally with an administrator, the difficulty, of course is, frankly, if I were back in the classroom I would bristle at the idea, too, of someone telling me what my attitude should be. I can't really tell somebody, 'Well, you should love the military people coming back', because frankly, that would be counterproductive, too.

The chances that sensitivity training would result in a negative outcome are balanced by the history of efforts to educate faculty on civil rights and women's issues. F2 explained,

The same way that faculty needed to become aware of women's rights issues and the same way that faculty had to become aware of African American, civil rights issues and part of it is a consciousness raising, where you don't put your arm around a student when you're talking to her. Thirty years ago . . . that was part of teaching. It's not that we should be putting our arm around veterans, but metaphorically we should be and we need to be understanding that they have a . . . whole host of issues that they are dealing with that affects their behaviors in classrooms and one of them is the expectation that what they did is not respected and that the liberal, hippie teachers, of which I'm one, don't value what they did and look down on them and think that they are baby killers.

Moreover, Sokolow and Lewis (2008) stated that new federal antidiscrimination laws are expected to become enacted designating veterans as a protected class. From an institutional view, employee training may soon be a necessity. FGF2 warned, "Veterans are the forgotten minority. If we treated any other group of students the way we treat vets [we would have] equal opportunity [issues]."

*Training for PTSD and related disorders.* Analysis of the data revealed the importance of having skills related to PTSD recognition. According to Jessica Hamblen (2009) of the National Center for PTSD,

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of a traumatic event. A traumatic event is a life-threatening event such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or physical or sexual assault in adult or childhood. . . . Some people will have stress reactions that do not go away on their own, or may even get worse over time. . . . People with PTSD experience three different kinds of symptoms. The first set of symptoms involves reliving the trauma in some way such as becoming upset when confronted with a traumatic reminder or thinking about the trauma when you are trying to do something else. The second set of symptoms involves either staying away from places or people that remind you of the trauma, isolating from other people, or feeling numb. The third set of symptoms includes things such as feeling on guard, irritable, or startling easily. (¶1 & 2)

F1 discussed why an awareness of PTSD is important and how PTSD affects a student's classroom behavior.

I've had students that, for whatever reason, couldn't focus enough to do the work. I think that some sort of – I don't want to say PTSD screening, but PTSD awareness raising with faculty, with counselors, with students, would help go a long ways because a lot of behaviors that can manifest themselves out of PTSD aren't recognized as symptoms of PTSD. They are recognized as belligerent, they are recognized as lack of interest or lack of – when in fact the student is not disinterested. The student can't focus. The student is too busy wondering who's coming through the door to pay attention to who the teacher is, meaning not processing stuff that is coming in and then falling away and not being internalized information, so that the student needs things repeated. That sort of thing; the short fuse, the lack of willingness to reach out.

F1 further described how students with PTSD have difficulty participating in classroom activities, expressing themselves, and making eye contact. F1 described PTSD as a disorder with gradations in dire need of understanding if students are to be adequately served. Derek Blumke (2008), president of Student Veterans of America, provides support for this finding when he stated that veterans are failing tests as a result of

cognitive issues and memory loss. In addition, the researcher has detected cognition and recall difficulties in some of her students who are veterans.

PS1 identified counseling services as being the least helpful of services available to veterans at the case institution, particularly in the area of PTSD awareness and training. When asked what is least helpful to students who are veterans, PS1 explained, “I guess the lack of counseling services . . . counselors that are specifically trained to work with some of the issues that veterans have, especially returning veterans with PTSD and some of those issues.”

#### *Difficulties Veterans Face*

This theme encompasses general challenges, in contrast to specific difficulties such as PTSD, facing veterans as students. The participants’ answers to the research question regarding the needs of veterans are linked to the difficulties veterans encounter at the community college. For example, the issue of dealing with immature classmates seems to be particularly problematic. The consequences of frustration and expressed anger may lead to a potential disciplinary situation for the student. A3 shared,

They find sometimes it difficult to tolerate the immaturity of some of their peers or classmates. The way they are treated by some of their younger, traditional age students, the comments and statements that they hear from them sometimes really tries their patience. I’ve had occasion to have students in my office for judicial hearings based upon their inability to tolerate another immature student. As we sit and have the conversation there in my office they recognize how they diverge from their classmates in the class and they understand what’s going on – their lack of patience and their [classmates] immaturity versus their [veterans] maturity.

The fact that veterans are nontraditional students with unique life experiences contributes to their difficulties in relating to students and teachers. A1 explained,

There are traditional students and nontraditional students. I think there are many professors who are not prepared to deal with both in the same classroom at the same time. They are vastly different; vastly different. Adult students learn differently from traditional students because they are always trying to match it up with the real life experiences they have had, which are much more powerful than anything you read about. So they sit there listening to what's happening and they want to match it up. They want to connect it to the experiences they have had. Well, for many veterans, the experiences they have had are so different than those of traditional students and even those of other adult students because the military experience is not like the experience of working at Sears. It's a different experience.

In general, veterans' life experiences have taught them to place a high priority on education and to have limited patience for immature actions and statements, which can become a source of conflict. A3 stated,

Sometimes they can become angered, and so they will make statements that are very disrespectful to the classmate. Sometimes it's kind of attacking or accusatory, those kinds of statements, which is inappropriate. They may find themselves even coming upon or bumping up against instigating a problem, a conflict with a classmate and it all stems out of that immaturity that they are watching and they just have no patience for it because they are very serious about being there for their education and not everybody is in the same mindset that they are.

Moreover, participants thought that the lack of agreement concerning duty to veterans at the national and institutional levels is problematic. A2 asserted that if veterans are not considered a special population of students then the sacrifices they have made are discounted.

I think the country generally disregards the sacrifices that people make for the country. When they come back to reinsert, they get no consideration. They are just like any other civilian, any other citizen. I don't think that's right. They have given up years of their lives, lived in some pretty crummy places, done some pretty crummy things and in many cases risked their existence to make this place safe so that the rest of us can go to school. I think they are entitled to a little consideration and if that means we should provide someone to help them out to be successful students, I don't think that's unreasonable. But many people, I think, disagree with me. That's how I feel about it.

### *Veteran Friendly Environment*

Participants often expressed the importance of a veteran friendly environment, which is characterized by sincerity, affirmation, and helpfulness. F1 stated,

We can make our classrooms as welcoming as possible, without drawing unwanted attention to our veteran students. When a veteran wants to talk about her experiences, listen—and don't try to wrap up the conversation with a pretty bow. Tim O'Brien said that a true war story doesn't have a conclusion or moral. Let veterans know you honor and appreciate their sacrifices and willingness to serve, but do it in a way that comes from your own heart. Veteran students have often told me that when they hear 'Thank you for your service,' it comes across to them as an empty phrase. Be an ally, not a counselor. It's enough to let them know that you care about them as students and will help them in any way you can, as you would for any other student.

Simply accepting them for who they are provides veterans with the basic human need of validation. A2 explained,

Based upon my reading and going through materials from webinars and conversations that I've had, I've come to believe that the needs that many of the veterans have attending [case institution] at least is one in which they find that the campus is friendly to who they are.

A2 continued to explain that having someone at the institution, who heads a support network that serves and understands veterans, contributes to a welcoming atmosphere. A welcoming atmosphere benefits the institution as well as the students it serves. According to A1, in order to attract students who are veterans to the case institution, a “welcoming and supportive environment . . . is critical to what people look for when they come to a place like this or any other community college.”

Easily accessible college programs and services that are integrated with community efforts are contributing factors to a veteran friendly environment. A2 explained, “People need to know that this is a veteran friendly place and that we have

services here that can help you to connect back with the college, with the community and that needs to be a click away.” Institutional attitudes and veteran specific programs and services are the underpinning of a veteran friendly atmosphere. Regarding the instructional environment, A2 stated, “They have a need to feel welcomed in the classroom and at the same time have a need to feel as though they are with other adults and mature people when they are in that classroom.”

Response to Research Question 2: What Programs and Services are Currently in Place at the Community College to Address the Needs of Veterans?

The case institution has a plethora of programs and services that meet the needs of students including veterans; however, the findings that address this research question specifically focus on students who are veterans. Moreover, the findings report on programs and services currently in place at the case institution and the programs and services the college is planning to implement. The case institution has demonstrated that it is open to changing its approach to serving students who are veterans.

*Programs and Services Currently in Place*

According to the college website, the case institution accepts the Post 9/11 GI Bill, which provides a maximum benefit of free tuition, a monthly housing allowance, and a yearly stipend for books and supplies of up to \$1000 for qualified veterans. Moreover, the case institution has a newly formed veterans’ association and is a member of Student Veterans of America (SVA). Also new to the campus is the Veterans Service Officer (VSO) who is onsite one day per week for six hours. The VSO is an employee of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, which is a state agency that connects

veterans and their families to programs and services for veterans. The college employs a Veterans Certifying Official (VCO) who is listed on the college website as a veterans' education supervisor. According to F1, S1, and S2 the VCO is a compassionate and knowledgeable person who veterans contact if they are having problems or are in need of advice.

The VCO provides students who are veterans with (a) individual benefit counseling for themselves and their dependents; (b) an interpretation of the case institution and VA policies; (c) an evaluation of military and nonmilitary transcripts for students receiving educational benefits; (d) an evaluation of military and nonmilitary transcripts for students not receiving educational benefits; (e) liaison services between the veterans and the VA to help them understand their benefits, how they are processed, and how they are certified; (f) standards of progress in order to remain eligible for benefits; (g) orientations for the college law enforcement academy; and (g) advising services. The Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) benefits are processed in the records office by the VCO and the state veterans grant benefits are processed in the financial aid office by the coordinator for scholarships. According to the VCO, the records and financial aid office coordinate veterans' benefits so that veterans receive a full and complete package.

Additionally, the college offers financial aid extensions for payment when necessary; access to a network of VCO's at other institutions; referrals for mental health, work force, VA health benefits, and unemployment counseling; and current information on veteran related legislation regarding education and health benefits. The college website has an efficient and streamlined veterans' benefits page that is accessible from

the site index and the records page. The benefits page includes links to detailed information regarding (a) covered programs, (b) educational benefits, (c) required documentation for educational benefits, and (d) military transcripts. The veterans' benefits page also integrates institutional and military sources of information by providing additional links.

F1 shared, "We have a growing list of services that are available for veterans." Recently created services include the Veterans Textbook Scholarship and a Web Automated Verification Enrollment (WAVE) card which is included in the admission packet. The WAVE card is used for attendance verification purposes. Also, according to the college website, a federally funded veterans counseling certificate and degree program available to counselors, faculty, and online students is being developed. The purpose of the program is to provide training in assisting returning veterans with the military to civilian transition. In addition, the case institution hosts an annual veterans' benefits fair at the college linking veterans to local service providers. However, attendance at the fair has been sparse.

#### *College Programs and Services Proposal*

The state mandated, but unfunded Higher Education Veterans Service Act (2009) stipulates adjustments in how colleges serve their veteran student population. The case institution plans to implement key components of the state bill as outlined in an eight point proposal. First, a survey regarding services and programs that are offered to students who are veterans is to be completed by a designated date. Information from the survey will be statistically analyzed, interpreted, and submitted to the Board of Higher

Education, Department of Veterans' Affairs, president and minority leader of the state Senate, the speaker and minority leader of the House of Representatives, and the governor by a designated date. Second, the college's homepage will have a link to the veterans' webpage. In addition, the survey will be a part of a veterans' guidebook available by a designated date. Third, the current VCO has been selected to be the coordinator of veterans and military personnel student services. The new position will be reviewed by human resources and activated by a designated date. Fourth, a veterans' services office is planned to be part of the college center currently under construction.

According to the 2009 proposal,

The intent is to have a centralized location specializing in the unique issues faced by our veterans, particularly in the areas of education and transition. This is in line with the 'one stop shop' proposal for the new college center. A central office would provide collective resources for veterans on veterans affairs, the Montgomery GI Bill, state benefits, and work rehabilitation programs, giving them access to federal programs that pertain to their needs as students. This will improve student retention by creating better access to academic resources. The goal is to be at the forefront in design access and service improvements offered to this unique segment of the [case institution] body.

Fifth, information pertinent to veterans will be reviewed by the veterans' coordinator and disseminated by mailings and web pages. Sixth, an evaluation report from the Board of Higher Education and the governor will identify services and programs needing improvement. Seventh, a best practices report issued by the Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs will be reviewed to identify services and programs that the case institution can implement. Eighth, the veterans' coordinator will initiate a joint effort between academic and student services in order to identify and

improve academic and social programming for students who are veterans. In addition, the coordinator will collaborate with the SVA.

In summary, the case institution currently has some services that specifically address the veterans' informational needs. Moreover, and importantly, a detailed proposal is in place to further assess and address the needs of veterans.

### Response to Research Question 3: What Recommendations Can Be Made for Improving the Veterans' Community College Experience?

The participants' recommendations for improving the community college experience of veterans were reflective of and responsive to the findings that addressed the first research question. Using the participants' recommendations, this section reexamines the five major themes: (a) credit streamlining; (b) streamlining of programs and services; (c) faculty, advisor, and counselor training; (d) difficulties encountered by veterans, and (e) factors that constitute a veteran friendly campus. From the overall participant perspective, improvement of the veterans' community college experience begins with understanding the difficulties they encounter and their perception of what it means to be veteran friendly. Thus the participants linked the case institution's awareness of veterans' needs to its ability to listen and validate students for who they are as individuals and members of the college community. St1 aptly stated,

Stop making these students feel invisible. If they are feeling invisible, there is a reason for that. . . . Make these students feel like we want them to be here, just like we want international students to be here, just like we want honor students to be here. . . . The invisibility is they don't have anything that makes them feel connected here.

Table 3 shows the interrelationships among the themes and subthemes that address the third research question.

### *Credit Streamlining*

Participants viewed credit streamlining and credit transfer as characteristics of a veteran friendly campus. A2 recommended formalizing credit transfer from the DANTESS and believed that credit for prior learning should be expanded: “I think one can set up a system here that can make that [credit for prior learning] happen much more quickly than it probably does.” The benefits of credit streamlining to the veterans and the institution were recognized by the administration. A1 recommended that the case institution become a member of SOC degree paths in order to attract students who are veterans: “We could easily triple our veteran enrollment here.” A2 suggested examining local transfer opportunities where free baccalaureate degrees for veterans are offered: “They [local universities] would all love to see transfers from the community college. I think we need to be a more constant deliverer about how we can connect those dots.”

### *Streamlining of Programs and Services*

F1 suggested that the way to make the case institution veteran friendly was to build programs and then advertise them with a veterans’ link on the college website.

You know, ‘attention veterans!’ . . . We are doing a benefits fair in the middle of April. We are going to be reaching out to the community, doing radio stuff. . . . [Figure] out some way to tell the larger community. We need to build up, we need to establish these programs and then build the reputation of being veteran friendly.

*Collaboration.* Participants thought that joining forces with organizations outside the college would afford more opportunities for veterans to engage the larger community.

Table 3

*Interrelationships Among Themes and Subthemes That Address Research Question Three*

|   |   |  |  |   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Credit streamlining   | Streamlining of programs and services   | Faculty, advisor and counselor training  | Difficulties veterans face   | Veteran friendly environment  |
| Expansion of prior learning credit eases difficulties veterans face and promotes a veteran friendly environment | Collaboration affords more opportunities for community veteran engagement and leveraging of resources           | Faculty and counselor unawareness of PTSD and related disorders exacerbates difficulties veterans face | Connection to veteran serving community agencies lacking                     | Easing restriction on credit transfer promotes a veteran friendly atmosphere                    |
|   | Community outreach offers opportunities for connecting veterans and special populations                         |  | Beneficial links between veterans and special populations do not exist       | Connecting veterans to the community facilitates reintegration                                  |
|   | Academic success depends upon ability to navigate bureaucracy, services received, and connection to the college |  | Absence of veteran specific orientation, seminars, and workshops             | Veteran specific programs and services promote a welcoming environment                          |
|   | Seek grant funding for building programs that support academic success  |  | Deficiency of grant funded programs focused on veterans such as Upward Bound | Programs that promote academic success of veterans contribute to a veteran friendly environment |
|   | Veterans center is the most helpful service for students  |  | <i>Run around</i> from one office to the next                                | Veteran center is top priority for veterans   |

S1 stated, “I’d like to see more veterans’ organizations involved in there like Marine Corps League, Disabled American Veterans, [and] American Legion.” A2 concurred, “We do need to have better connections with veteran serving agencies in the community, whether it’s homeless or homeless vets or county support, private individuals or ... Veterans Affairs.” S1 explained the benefits of linking the case institution to the larger community:

Disabled American Veterans. There’s a ton of them [organizations]. There should be a lot more involvement with them at the community level, because there are scholarships and stuff like that. Being in the military is kind of like a fraternity and having those guys come down, people can help them get jobs and actually point them in directions. It’s a good mentor program, I think, that could be involved in there.

A3 further explained that by working collaboratively with outside organizations and leveraging external resources the case institution could save on personnel. The case institution has best practice models for collaboration. For example, A2 recommended expanding collaboration with the larger community by using minority services and English as a Second Language (ESL) as models:

We have good examples of all of this [networking with organizations] already. We know how to do this, we do it in minority service in the minority office. We’ve got good working models. We do it with immigrants and ESL. We don’t need to reinvent the model, but we need to apply it.

*Community outreach.* The demographics of the veteran population afford an opportunity for the case institution to reach out to special populations. For example, because African Americans comprise a high percentage in the case institution’s veteran population, A2 recognized this as a potential asset.

Real opportunities [exist] to work with well trained, mature people who could then represent the college in the community, whether it’s working as tutors for

minority students in the high schools and the elementary schools, working with the community agencies, whether it's PADS or whatever, service learning opportunities. I think they would just bring a wonderful resource . . . because we know . . . that the more students connect with the college, the better their chances of success.

*Academic success.* The academic success of veterans is in part dependent upon (a) their ability to navigate the bureaucracy, (b) the services they receive, and (c) the strength of connection to the college. As stated by A2:

I know that really we do need to have a program that focuses on veterans without labeling them as a special group, but that does understand their needs, reaches to them, engages them, and offers them opportunities. I think that's what could really improve things for us, bureaucracy on the one hand, services and connection on the other hand, and the academic piece in the middle.

St1 recommended taking a more holistic approach to the education of veterans beginning with the orientation process:

Informing veterans about their benefits is . . . totally left out of the orientation process. So, I think we need to if not have a separate one, at least be more inclusive with that information in the orientation that we already put forth.

Moreover, St1 explained, "I think it would be very helpful if there were some sort of an academic success transition program." F1 recommended acquiring funding for academic success workshops and seminars. FGSt1 suggested that classes for veterans only would promote camaraderie and provide a supportive environment. The importance of camaraderie to academic success was explained by S2 while recommending a buddy system for veterans to ease their transition into education.

It would be great to have that transition where you feel comfortable around maybe people who are experiencing the same problem. . . . A fellow veteran . . . would just get it. . . . That's what we have in the military. When you get put in a new unit you get a buddy and your buddy basically walks you through it. I know it's kind of like childish . . . but . . . you are in a new place, you don't know where to start. . . . So, a buddy would be nice. . . . Have somebody assigned to every person

that comes in, too. It would be nice to come in and talk to somebody that knows a little bit.

A2 concurred, “I think they are entitled to a little consideration and if that means we should provide someone to help them out to be successful students, I don’t think that’s unreasonable.” S1 suggested implementing preferences for veterans who are applying to competitive programs. According to S1, preferences could be a way of rewarding veterans for their service.

A2 provided a recommendation for making the connections between academic success, jobs for veterans, and institutional viability.

Audit academic offerings against vet jobs. . . . One of the recommendations in my paper to the college is that we should audit all our academic offerings against 150 jobs suggested over here. Then also audit them against the skills that veterans bring and see where we could, in fact, be thinking about opportunities for vets. I think the academic side of the house has work to do here in terms of thinking through where they might be able to attract vets. On the other side of it, our programs are often looking for students. We are seeing hundreds of vets coming back. So if we want to make that connection, to me it’s a win-win for everybody. It’s a timely win for the vets.

According to A2, academic success is dependent upon accurate data recording and reporting, support networks, implementation of a data driven approach, and a veterans outreach program. A2 recommended tying the academic achievement of veterans to institutional marketing:

[Integrating] veterans into our normal reporting at the college so that we can talk about how well our veterans are doing. That becomes a part of the outreach program then to vets, as well. But if we know how they are doing we will then know where they are not doing as well as we would like them to and we can put some support services into place for them. When they are doing well, it is a wonderful way to promote the college as a site or as a place for veterans to get to. So, I think we can do that. I think improving the entire support networks, the veterans club right now that we have, but we have others that we are working on. I think that’s going to be very helpful and as I said earlier, I think all of the major

offices of the college that serve students, whether it's service learning, career services, volunteer services, whatever; if they could all get more conscious of the role of veterans.

*Program recommendations.* Participants recommended seeking grant funding to support the academic success of veterans. F1 explained the Veterans Upward Bound Program which is aimed at first generation college veterans:

It's a huge hurdle to get the grant written, but [blank] University is the only one in our area that is doing this, that has a grant in place. It would definitely be something that would be worth looking into . . . that is aimed specifically at, I think, a semester long program for veterans to help them develop study skills. . . . They [veterans] don't have to live in the district and they don't have to be going to [case institution]. I think it would be like an independent agency operating within [case institution] without [case institution] employees. The employees would all be paid through the grant and they would be using space here.

A2 described and recommended the Veterans' Upward Bound Program as a holistic approach to serving veterans through a focused and total commitment. St1 concurred, "Get an Upward Bound Grant. The only thing we would have to do is write a grant." In addition, St1 explained and recommended seeking funding for the Troops to Teachers and Spouses to Teachers Programs:

Troops to Teachers is a program that helps veterans who want to go into the teaching field, prepare for that and they also help with certification in order to pass the teacher certification test. That's a good program and they also have the other program Spouses to Teachers which is for dependents of veterans who want to go into the teaching field as well.

Acknowledging the increase in health science programs at the case institution, St1 recommended looking into the practices of a local college that recently won an ACE Grant for a veterans' program they have on campus. "They actually use their nursing students as interns in the nearest VA hospital." St1 also recommended being alert to external funding that is available for meeting the needs of veterans. He pointed to the

recently awarded three and a half million dollar grant that Walmart released to ACE for “schools who have programs on their campuses that are working for veterans.”

In addition to grant applications, A2 recommended utilizing the small cadre of full and part time faculty who are veterans to create networks of support for veterans. A2 stated, “They [faculty] tend to be the ones that take the initiative voluntarily to try and begin. Anecdotally, they hear about veterans and they reach out to them. That’s been very helpful where those networks have been created with veterans.” F2 recommended new faculty driven programs in human services, sociology, or psychology that could integrate veterans’ issues and simultaneously educate civilians and veterans. F2 also suggested using “courses and modules within courses that might address veterans’ issues, particularly the PTSD issues.”

*Veterans center.* Having a veterans center was a priority for most of the participants. A scaled survey of 59 veterans at the case institution indicated that most of the veterans surveyed ranked a one stop veterans center as being the most helpful service that veterans could receive.

PS1 recommended consolidating the records and financial aid needs of veterans into one office space. “I think one office for veterans . . . that houses all the educational benefits of GI, IVG, [and] advising. . . . maybe counseling.” Moreover, PS1 envisioned the veterans office space as a connection to community programs and services such as job placement and the homeless shelter. ST1 recommended being attentive to what other institutions are doing for veterans and referred to the Arkansas State University model,

the Personal Rehabilitation, Individual Development and Education (PRIDE) Veterans Center and explained how it is dedicated to wounded veterans.

PS1 thought that the veterans center should have a health services component for counseling. PS1 advocated,

I've always been a cheerleader for the . . . one veterans' office . . . where they can take care of anything they need. If they need to see a specialized advisor that would be there. I'm incorporating something into probably the health services area for counseling because . . . the need is there for communities like this . . . to be able to provide counseling services when it's necessary . . . soon enough I'm sure it will be [necessary] and they want to make sure we're prepared for that.

Participants recommended increasing the staff to support the VCO. For example, A2 explained,

We've had a veterans certifying official here for a number of years, but it's got to be more than processing papers, it's got to be somebody who is actively engaged with the issues and who is well informed, who is being regularly updated through conferences, training seminars, whatever. Then behind that person there is a network of other staff who when they get a call from this individual, I want to know what to do with it. So, staff in records and admissions and financial aid and advising and counseling, not just to have the one person.

Because veterans are being counseled by the military to attend community colleges, PS1 recommended adequate staffing of offices to handle the influx. PS1 explained "The transition officers really put in a good plug for community colleges. I was told that I should start off at the community college. So obviously you want to make sure that the offices are staffed well enough." S2 determined whether or not the case institution was veteran friendly by how well the offices that served veterans were staffed.

How can they say they are a military friendly school and all they have is a person to help to file paperwork with the VA? So when they say military friendly school, I want to have more than one person that knows what's going on.

Supporting S2's statement, A1 asked,

Where is the VA expert here? Is it just someone that they pointed at and said, 'You help people fill out the forms.' Well, that's not a VA assistance office. Colleges that do this well and are successful at it have a staff of two or three people who get it. They understand what it takes to help these students be successful. We are not there.

St1 recommended utilizing VA funded work study veterans. "From the size of or the amount of veterans we have here there are six or seven [work studies] that the VA will fund. So we can have full time coverage."

From an institutional view, the strategic staffing of a veterans' office with someone who has marketing skills is important for increasing enrollment. A1 believed that most veterans have decided which school they will attend before leaving their last assignment and recommended staffing the veterans' office with someone who can market the case institution. A1 explained, "Somebody who would spend time helping us do a better marketing job . . . Not necessarily an administrator, but a manager." From the veterans' perspective, St1 summed, "I think it [centralized location] will improve their understanding of the process. It would definitely be both more student friendly for them as well as veteran friendly."

#### *Faculty, Advisor, and Counselor Training*

Participants' recommendations for training included veterans' specific counseling and training for managing PTSD and related mental health issues. Because many behaviors manifested from PTSD are not recognized as symptoms of PTSD, F1 recommended training to increase faculty and counselor awareness of PTSD and related disorders. In addition, the linkage among data tracking, counseling, and retention was identified by F1. He recommended using a data driven approach to show the impact

counseling has on retention of veterans. “We’ve got to . . . pull people in or not let them leave. . . . Checking in with veterans while they are here, tracking them and seeing how they are doing . . . [using] a counselor or mentors.”

Participants were unanimous in their recommendation for veterans’ specific counseling. PS1 explained why specific advising for veterans is needed.

Having an advisor specifically for veterans or active duty, because I think that being able to advise them for their future career is going to be different than you would advise the traditional age, especially depending on what you go into and especially because a lot of the veterans have military credits that will count toward their degree.

A1 recommended a community college equivalent of the military education officer.

Every military organization has an education officer. Most of them have . . . education counselors that are full time . . . with a master’s degree in counseling who help service members make the right decisions concerning their education.

A1 also recommended considering the University of Phoenix model of counseling where counselors reach out to students at the first sign of academic difficulty. A2 concurred, “Given the larger number of veterans, we need counselors [and] we need advisors. . . . trained in ferreting out those needs and then being sympathetic to what the possible experiences might have been.”

S2 identified veteran specific counseling as the most important factor in moving the case institution in a veteran friendly direction and recommended, “A counselor that just deals with veterans.” S1 adamantly added, “The thing I keep stressing is more guidance, more VA counselors.” Based on the need to assist a large number of veterans who lack career direction, PS1 recommended, “Having an advisor strictly for that

demographic. I know a lot of students come in and don't have any idea what they want to do.”

In conclusion, the recommendations for improving the educational experience of veterans were underpinned with a sense of obligation to veterans. F1 stated,

As a country we need to own our own responsibilities. We send these people to war and we promise them an education and they deserve an education. They deserve to be treated with respect and they deserve to get whatever help they need. And to say that they volunteered, so that's their choice is just so short sighted.

A1 suggested that the viability of recommendations made by advocates for veterans is strong.

You know, the killer is, this is all doable. We could be ready to do this within a year. We could be good at it within a year if they hired the right one or two people. We only need a manager and maybe an admin person.

### Summary

The case study institution is a community college with approximately 30,000 students and a growing veteran population. Including the focus group, the 13 participants comprised five students, three administrators, three faculty members, and two staff members. This chapter presented the findings of the study by answering the research questions and addressing the purpose of the study which was to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs.

Five major themes related to the veterans' perspectives of their needs at the case institution emerged from the data during the analysis process: (a) credit streamlining; (b) streamlining of programs and services; (c) faculty, advisor, and counselor training; (d)

difficulties encountered by veterans, and (e) factors that constitute a veteran friendly campus. These five themes were linked and presented in an integrated way in order to holistically understand the participants' answers to the research questions. The findings were reported from the viewpoint of what benefits the institution and what benefits the students who are veterans using Rendon's theory of validation as the theoretical lens.

There were three major areas identified by veterans that need to be addressed. First, credit streamlining was explained within the context of how to facilitate the processing of military experience and prior coursework toward a student's credits using SOC, ACE guidelines, and DANTES. Second, streamlining of programs and services was identified as a need by the participants; this included targeted programming for veterans that fosters a sense of belonging and camaraderie. For example, the cohort model of education and veterans center were examined within the context of what makes a campus veteran friendly. Third, participants identified the need for faculty, counselor, and advisor training in order to facilitate sensitivity to veterans' issues. Participants explained why training of faculty, counselors, and advisors in PTSD and related disorders was important if students are to be adequately served.

Programs and services available to veterans at the case institution are in a state of flux. The college is currently attempting to shift its approach to serving students who are veterans in order to meet the challenges of a changing economic climate and increasing numbers of veterans attending community college. The Illinois Higher Education Veterans Service Act is the driving force behind many of the proposed changes at the case institution.

Reflecting the findings of the first research question, the participants' recommendations for improving the community college experience of veterans revisited the five major themes. Participants linked improvement of the community college experience of veterans to the case institution's ability to validate students by listening and being aware of their needs. Program recommendations were underpinned by a sense of urgency toward academic success through camaraderie and community support.

This chapter ends with a quote from F2 as he poignantly states, "The crucial piece is to talk to the students and listen critically to what they say. . . . Listen sympathetically and compassionately to the students and try to develop programming that will address their underlying needs."

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Overview of the Research Study

This qualitative case study identified the needs of veterans and examined programs and services at the case institution that are essential to meeting those needs. Six data collection techniques were used: (a) interviews, (b) a focus group, (c) observations, (d) field notes, (e) document reviews, and (f) demographic questionnaires. Data triangulation, peer reviews, disclosure and reflexivity in controlling bias, and a clear delineation of the research process strengthened the validity and reliability of the study. Transferability of the study was enabled by providing rich thick descriptions. The data analysis strategy was based on Creswell's (2007) data analysis spiral.

Selection of the case study institution was based on its ability to provide rich data for addressing the research questions and participants who expressed an interest in the study. The participants were purposively chosen using criterion and chain sampling and included students and college employees.

The purpose of the study was to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs. Three research questions guided the study:

1. What do veterans perceive their needs to be at the community college?
2. What programs and services are currently in place at the community college to address the needs of veterans?

3. What recommendations can be made for improving the veterans' community college experience?

The study is significant for four reasons. First, it presents a holistic account of the community college experience of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans. Second it adds to the literature by (a) filling a void in research on the education of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, (b) providing a framework to examine veterans' concerns as they attempt reentry into the civilian world via education, and (c) providing an interpretive study with thick descriptive data not found in the current literature on the education of veterans. Third, the research gives a voice to veterans who are community college students. Finally, this study fulfills the underlying motive for the research by providing community colleges with insights that may enable them to improve their programs, services, and practices in support of the growing population of students who are veterans.

#### Discussion

The premise of interconnection that exists among the five emergent themes continues when using the four selected theories and conceptual frameworks to analyze and give meaning to the findings: (a) the Human Capital Theory (HCT) of Education, (b) Rendon's theory of validation, (c) globalization, and (d) holistic spirituality. Through the use of multiple perspectives, this chapter provides an interpretation of the findings that reveals the lessons of this research and its relationship to the existing body of literature. Moreover, using the aforementioned theories and concepts to further analyze the findings supports a more holistic view of the phenomenon of veterans' education.

*Theoretical, and Conceptual Links*

The research context was filled with confusion and therefore presented challenges for interpretation of the data on many fronts. The confusion cascades from the federal to state to institutional level. With the expanded GI Bill funds being “the largest educational-benefits payment in the 65-year history of the GI Bill”, (Wright, 2009a, ¶ 1) and the relatively short period of time allowed for implementation of the bill, perhaps confusion was inevitable. For example, many of the approximately 200,000 veterans who have applied for the Post 9/11 benefits have not received their benefits checks in a timely manner and this has resulted in a failure to meet tuition payment deadlines (Philpott, 2009; Wright, 2009b). Moreover, according to Nelson (2009), students must wait for the colleges to certify veteran enrollment, which also has added to the backlog of processing checks.

Superficially, it seems that funding at the state level via the Illinois Veterans Grant (IVG) would be a welcome and mutual benefit to the veterans and the case institution; however, upon closer examination the IVG is a source of frustration for the college. The current funding deficit in Illinois has shifted fiscal responsibility for the IVG to the college. Moreover, ongoing state budget cuts with concomitant unfunded mandates such as the Higher Education Veterans Service Act (2009) negatively impact the open access role of the case institution. The college cannot meet all the demands placed upon it while faced with decreasing state financial support.

Confusion at the institutional level can be attributed to a lack of communication between the expert Veterans Certifying Official (VCO) and the administration. A

disconnect between the administration and the VCO impedes the streamlining of credit for veterans. Therefore, confusion at the institutional level can be readily corrected if senior administrators adopt the suggestions outlined by the VCO. The VCO has been promoting an immediate centralized campus location for veterans as well as external collaboration which could bring community resources into the college to better serve the veterans. Improved and targeted services and programs would positively impact the community college experience for students who are veterans, and thus support retention and completion.

*HCT of education.* When viewed through the lens of the HCT of Education, increased student retention parallels the theory's premise that knowledge acquired through education is a form of productive investment. For example, the qualifications and evidence students receive in the form of a degree or a transfer transcript enables them to gain improved employment or access to a baccalaureate program. Therefore, retention to completion is an investment in a student's personal capital. Moreover, a grass roots interest in program and services streamlining at the institutional level could potentially influence the thinking of legislators at state and federal levels as successful efforts at the institutional level are acknowledged. Therefore, the case institution has an opportunity to gain support from legislators who shape the workings of the community college through funding. Not only is the case institution in a position to influence legislation by example, but it stands to benefit from future federal and state investments that will impact the ability of veterans to participate in education. Legislators are turning to community colleges for education that supports development of the workforce (Moltz, 2008);

consequently, the view that education of veterans contributes to the productive investment and subsequent economic growth of the state and nation links directly to the federal and state governments' interests.

From the veteran's perspective, the benefits of education are opportunities for increasing future income, marketability, mobility, and self worth. With minorities comprising 33% of armed forces applicants, new recruits, and enlisted and officer members of active and reserve personnel (Dept of Defense, 2008, ¶ 5), ethnic minorities and emerging majorities are well served when veterans' educational needs are met. Moreover, Lederman (2009c) explains that the issue of ill-served and under represented minorities in higher education is framed by the current Obama administration as an economic matter. The competitive edge afforded by education prepares veterans for active participation in the global economy.

*Globalization.* The HCT view of the research findings directly links to a global view of veterans' education. *Access to Success Initiative* participant William Kirwin states, "A college education has become the passport to a meaningful job and high quality of life" (Lederman, 2009c, ¶ 14). The goal of the *Access to Success Initiative*, begun in 2007, is to restore the nation to its post secondary educational world position (2009c). An emphasis on veterans education at the institutional level that filters to the state and federal levels will aid in moving the United States toward its former top ranking position in the global competition for having the most citizens who participate in post secondary education.

Moreover, the federal government has demonstrated a commitment to veterans education by passing the 9/11 GI Bill. Furthermore, the current influx of veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars provide an opportunity for the case institution to actively participate in the economic recovery of the nation by (a) providing streamlined programs and services for veterans, (b) training faculty and counselors in issues that impact the education of veterans, (c) understanding the difficulties veterans face, and (d) knowing what it means to be a veteran friendly institution. In a *flat* world of linked economies, a US economic recovery would have a positive global impact. The importance of viewing veterans education from multiple perspectives is clear and carries forward into the next section which relates to student validation.

*Rendon's theory of validation.* Many veterans come to higher education with positive attributes that will transfer to success in higher education; however, positive traits ascribed to veterans are best realized in an environment where veterans are valued. The dispositions that students have learned in the military such as work ethic, a group effort mentality, and maturity have the potential of not only assuring the educational success of veterans, but also greater achievement by other students who are exposed to the positive classroom behavior modeled by veterans, particularly if the faculty leverages these assets. Moreover, classroom management techniques utilized by faculty can limit the frustration veterans experience when sharing the classroom with traditional age students. The HCT *accountant's* interpretation of opportunity for increasing future income, marketability, mobility, and self worth is tempered by Rendon's theory of validation which places self worth as a precondition to student academic success.

Because education is important in the human sense as well as the capitalist sense, it is important to view the findings from a lens that focuses on the whole person.

Townsend and Bragg's (2006) analysis of Rendon's theory places responsibility for initiating contact with students on faculty and counselors. A 2009 *Checkbox Survey* of veterans at the case institution showed that greater than 70% of the respondents agreed that faculty and staff training in veteran sensitive issues was important to the success of veterans at the case institution. The results of the survey are in agreement with the emphasis that interview participants of this research placed on faculty and counselor training. Faculty and counselors have been identified by the veterans as being in a position of directly impacting the academic success of veterans. Thus, faculty and counselor training in sensitivity issues and difficulties veterans face when returning to the classroom play a central role in validating the case institution's veteran population.

Additionally, veterans are validated when they feel welcome on campus as well as in the classroom. For example, a veterans center that is staffed with experts in veterans' education was identified by most interview participants as the most pressing need of veterans at the case institution. Moreover, 80% of survey respondents at the case institution rated a veterans center as the most important targeted service that would be helpful to veterans. The case institution can show veterans that it cares about them by implementing streamlined and targeted programs and services, providing faculty and counselor training, understanding the difficulties veterans face, and striving to improve the campus environment as a veteran friendly college.

*Holistic spirituality.* Learning in the context of a spiritual quotient connects to globalization as indicated by Friedman (2006) who argues that curiosity and passion are more important than intelligence in a *flat* world of high speed information. Tisdell's (2007) description of meaning making by human connections, relationships, and respecting different points of view explains how people construct knowledge. The breadth of experience, focus, and maturity that veterans bring to higher education places them in a position of appreciating and valuing their education. Moreover, from the perspective of spiritual learning, veterans may serve as role models for traditional age students thus bringing added value to the campus.

From the perspective of the veterans, spiritual learning provides a dimension to education that enhances the acquisition of knowledge. Also, because many veterans have been changed by their experiences of war, spiritual healing facilitated by caring counselors and attentive faculty can positively impact the educational experience of veterans. This approach has been used in a spiritual program for military men and women offered by Mayslake Ministries (2009) designed to address post traumatic spiritual stress.

#### *Summary*

Four selected theories and conceptual frameworks--Human Capital Theory (HCT) of Education, Rendon's theory of validation, globalization, and holistic spirituality--provide a means for understanding the research findings from multiple perspectives. Just as the emergent themes of the research interconnect with one another, so do the ways in which the findings are viewed; thereby, providing a wide lens for understanding the phenomenon of veterans education.

## Conclusions

The conclusions resulting from this qualitative case study are drawn from answers to the three research questions. What do veterans perceive their needs to be at the community college? What programs and services are currently in place at the community college to address the needs of veterans? What recommendations can be made for improving the veterans' community college experience?

### *Veterans' Perceived Needs*

Readily accessible college programs and services that are integrated with external resources and community efforts underpin addressing the needs of veterans at the case institution. First, the most mentioned need of veterans was a central space where students could find information on educational benefits, programs, and services that are veteran specific. This is consistent with Student Veterans of America board member Rodrigo Garcia (2009), who also described a veterans' center as critical to the academic success of veterans who are community college students.

Second, veterans expressed a need for easing the process of transferring military coursework, prior coursework completed at other institutions, and military experiential learning toward college credit at the case institution. This finding is supported by Student Veterans of America (SVA) (2008) members who have voiced the need for recognizing ACE credits, shortening in house programs for veterans, and improved military transcript evaluation. Moreover, because credit transfer difficulties were viewed as being a result of ineffective advising, participants in this study expressed the need for a veteran specific approach to counseling and advising. Improved articulation between military and

institutional credits could reduce the frustration veterans experience at the college and serve as means of validating veterans as a unique and deserving population of students.

Third, veterans expressed a general need for programming and services that are confluent with making the case institution veteran friendly and reducing barriers to retention and completion. For example, participants articulated a need for addressing feelings of isolation and lack of camaraderie veterans experience upon returning to the classroom. Schupp (2009) also has mentioned the challenges veterans face when transitioning to the campus and classroom, although his observations are within a university context. He emphasized that the veteran's experience during the first day on campus is of particular importance. As stated in the 2008 College Student Health Survey Report: Health and Health-Related Behaviors published by the University of Minnesota, "The unique life experiences of veterans require colleges to think critically about the types of programs and services they offer and whether they meet the particular needs of veterans" (p. 7).

Moreover, participants voiced a concern for better classroom management of antimilitary bias. It is apparent from the literature that instances of insensitivity directed toward veterans also are experienced in other higher education institutions. In an article by James (2009), Derek Blumke, cofounder of the Student Veterans of America (SVA), offered examples of antimilitary bias directed toward him while a student at the University of Michigan. In recognition of this issue, a new federal anti-discrimination law has been proposed that would recognize veterans as a protected class (Lewis & Sokolow, 2008).

Participants also expressed a need for faculty and counselors to be trained in recognizing the symptoms of PTSD and related disorders that negatively impact the learning abilities of veterans. However, the literature shows a lack of consensus in addressing the need for programs and services surrounding veterans' mental health issues. For example, on one end of the spectrum, Schupp (2009) challenges the need for training faculty and counselors, as the VA counselors are trained specifically to help veterans. On the other end of the spectrum, Sokolow and Lewis (2008) suggest that even the custodial staff, facilities managers, and administrative assistants receive training in recognizing PTSD and related disorders. The findings of this study would indicate the appropriateness of a midpoint along the spectrum for addressing the needs of students who are veterans at the case institution and perhaps other community colleges.

In summary, integration of the study's five emergent themes facilitated a comprehensive analysis of veterans' educational needs at the case institution: (a) credit streamlining, (b) streamlining of programs and services, (c) faculty, adviser, and counselor training, (d) difficulties veterans face, and (e) what constitutes a veteran friendly campus.

#### *Programs and Services that Currently Address Needs of Veterans*

The case institution's ability to provide programs and services that address the needs of veterans is currently in a state of flux. The veterans certifying official (VCO) is the most knowledgeable employee at the institution in the area of educational needs of veterans. The VCO has implemented a number of services and programs targeted for veterans. The College also has a Veterans Service Official (VSO) who is an employee of

the Veterans Administration (VA). The VSO, who is on campus one day per week, serves as a liaison between veterans and government agencies that provide programs and services for veterans and their families. The state has mandated an unfunded Higher Education Veterans Service Act (2009) that stipulates adjustments in how Illinois colleges serve their veteran student population. As a result of the mandate, the case institution has a detailed proposal in place to further evaluate and address the needs of veterans.

*Veterans' Recommendations for Improving Their Community College Experience*

Participants viewed credit streamlining as a veteran friendly characteristic. Easing the transfer of military credit and experiential learning would show veterans that the case institution respects and values the education veterans received while serving in the military. This is consistent with Tisdell's (2003) view of the fundamental respect needed to validate students as their multiple *ways of knowing* are acknowledged by higher education. Veterans also provided five suggestions for improving programs and services at the case institution. First, leveraging external resources would allow the college to meet obligations of the unfunded Higher Education Veterans Service Act mandated by the state. There is an absence of information in the literature on how institutions can address this type of unfunded mandate.

Second, a more holistic approach to the education of veterans that integrates beginning educational processes such as a veterans specific orientation and a first semester veterans learning community; continuing educational processes such as faculty support networks, and accurate data recording and reporting; and concluding educational

processes such as completion tracking and job placement assistance. Consistent with the findings of this research, Stripling (2008) reported a paucity of definitive data on veteran specific program outcomes. Third, in order to support the academic success of veterans at the case institution, participants recommended seeking grant funding for programs such as Veterans Upward Bound, Troops to Teachers, and Spouses to Teachers. Alvarez (2008) and Sachs (2008) have reported on the utility of such programs.

Fourth, a veterans center was ranked as being the most helpful service that veterans could receive at the case institution. The college has in its plans a space for veterans set aside in the future student center. A health services component for counseling in the proposed veterans center was suggested by veterans. In addition, participants recommended increasing the VCO's support staff in order to manage the influx of veterans that will be served in the center. Lewis and Sokolow (2008) have also stressed the importance of increasing staff in order to manage the increasing number of veterans attending colleges. Fifth, participants recommended veteran specific training for faculty and counselors in the area of PTSD and related disorders. Veterans recommended that veteran specific counseling replace the generalized counseling that veterans currently receive. Sensitivity training for faculty and counselors was also recommended by participants. However, as the literature is inconsistent regarding recommendations related to PTSD and veteran specific training for faculty and counselors, it is important to recognize the balanced approach to veterans' mental health issues described by the Sachs and Combat to College Team. Sachs (2008) suggested identifying the positive aspects of military experience that promote resiliency as opposed to weakness.

The confluence of a historical view of veterans' education, the value of veterans' education to society, the community college's role in educating veterans, and the voices of the study's participants facilitated a holistic view of veterans' education at the case institution. The value that veterans bring to the institution is reciprocal to the value the institution places on its student population of veterans. Veterans will seek institutions that are veteran friendly and veteran friendly community colleges will benefit from the veterans who choose their institution. Moreover, a veteran friendly environment is one that conveys an attitude of sincerity, compassion, affirmation, and helpfulness.

#### Implications for Community Colleges

As American community college campuses expect the influx of veterans to continue (Field, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Lewis & Sokolow, 2008; Palm, 2008; Pulley, 2008; Sachs, 2008), the findings of this study have at least three implications for helping community colleges respond to the rising enrollment of this special population. First, institutions prepared to meet the needs of veterans will project that they are veteran friendly, and therefore provide an attractive option for students who are returning to the classroom after military service. Recruiting veterans by offering targeted programs and services for this unique population of students is a way for community colleges to increase enrollments, improve retention, and enhance completion rates. Moreover, veterans will not require other types of financial aid because they bring federal dollars from the Post 9-11 GI Bill to the institution. Yet along with this funding may come increased competition, as indicated by Pulley (2008) in his article titled *On the Front*

*Lines* where the executive director of the Workforce Strategy Center, Julian Alssid admonished,

Notwithstanding veterans' preference for community colleges, the scope of available funds made available by the new law could also stiffen competition among institutions eager to tap the financial windfall. . . . I would expect that four-year and proprietary schools will aggressively court these veterans. . . . There will be plenty of competition for these folks. (§ 14 & 15)

Second, as discussed by Sokolow and Lewis (2008), legislation specifying veterans as a protected class is currently pending; therefore, community colleges should be proactive, instead of reactive, when addressing veterans' educational issues. This legislation will potentially impact student support services, personnel, and faculty. Moreover, colleges need to address antimilitary bias as a potential liability issue. Third, colleges need to examine programs and services that currently support minority groups and draw from them to design templates for addressing the needs of veterans. In this way community colleges can advance the mission of open access. The integration of these three implications into community colleges' planning and practice will move them in the direction of improved service to students who are veterans.

### Recommendations

#### *Recommendations for Improvement of Practice at the Case Institution*

Recommendations for improving programs and services for veterans at the case institution are based upon the findings of the study, which revealed actions that can be taken to better support the future success of these students. Through transferability, these recommendations also may assist other community colleges that are seeking to better

support their students who are veterans. The recommendations are presented using the thematic structure established to report the research findings in Chapter 4.

*Credit streamlining.* Six recommendations for improving veterans' credit transfer at the case institution emerged from the study.

- Utilize VA paid student aids to assist the VCO in credit transfer duties.
- Train two or three counselors as veteran credit transfer specialists who have expertise in SOC principles, ACE guidelines, and DAN TES.
- Formalize credit transfer from DAN TES.
- Show veterans that the institution values their military coursework and experiential learning by expanding course articulation with military credit and experience.
- Discontinue restrictions on the transfer of veterans' credits by (a) eliminating the mandatory fraction of credits that must be from the case institution in order to graduate and (b) granting degrees to veterans who have taken only electives at the case institution.
- Establish articulation agreements with private local four year institutions that offer free baccalaureate degrees for veterans.

*Streamlining of programs and services.* Thirteen recommendations for improving the streamlining of programs and services for the veteran population at the case institution resulted from the analysis.

- Seek funding for implementing the Schupp cohort model of education.
- Offer veterans' academic success workshops.

- Invite external mental health experts to present seminars on PTSD and related issues that impact student learning.
- Provide a veteran specific orientation every semester.
- Seek grant funding for the Veterans Upward Bound, Troops to Teachers, and Spouse to Teachers programs.
- Implement a highly visible *one stop* veterans' center that consolidates records and financial needs of veterans, colocate the VCO and VSO, and provide an area with privacy for benefits counseling.
- Advertise and market the veterans' center in the campus signage, website links, phonebook, college catalogue, and semester schedule to promote the campus as *veteran friendly*.
- Implement a data driven approach to tracking veteran recruitment, retention, and graduation rates.
- Leverage external resources to save on personnel by seeking collaboration with local mental health facilities, social services, and veterans' organizations that can provide mentoring, such as the Marine Corps League, Disabled American Veterans, and the American Legion. More specifically, connect the institution's nursing program to the nearest VA hospital where students who are veterans can intern.
- Increase communication with the VA through the VSO.
- Strengthen the veterans' connection to the college. One approach for accomplishing this is to recognize veterans as a resource for service learning

opportunities. For example, develop programming that encourages case institution veterans to work as tutors for elementary and high school disadvantaged students through community outreach.

- Develop faculty driven programs in human services, sociology, or psychology that incorporate veterans' issues such as PTSD thereby educating nonveterans and veterans.

*Faculty, adviser, and counselor training.* Five recommendations emerged for improving the faculty adviser, and counselor training at the case institution.

- Provide training for counselors in areas of PTSD and related mental health issues.
- Provide sensitivity training where faculty and counselors learn to recognize, understand, and address problems unique to veterans.
- Track the impact of counseling on veterans' retention and completion rates.
- Establish a faculty or counselor mentoring approach for veterans that involves outreach to students at the first sign of academic difficulty.
- Establish veteran specific counseling services.

*Difficulties veterans face.* Two recommendations address the difficulties veterans encounter at the case institution.

- Consider veterans to be a special population of students.
- Accept veterans for who they are in the classroom and on the campus.

*Veteran friendly atmosphere.* Three recommendations have been identified for promoting the campus as being veteran friendly.

- Foster a campus wide attitude that is welcoming to veterans by showing them compassion and respect.
- Build programs and services that meet the needs of veterans.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

Four recommendations for further research and generation of new questions are:

- Expanding the study to multiple institutions that represent more than one state.
- Identifying the needs of female students who are veterans and examining what is in place to serve this unique group of students.
- Examining the impact that educating veterans has on bringing minority and emerging majority students to higher education.
- Identifying the needs of active duty students who seek higher education and examining what is in place to serve their needs.

#### Chapter Summary

The study's conclusions, implications, and recommendations addressing the needs of veterans who are community college students and examining community college programs and services essential to meeting these needs were based on an analysis of the research findings and related literature. Veterans' needs were identified within each of the study's five emergent themes: (a) credit streamlining, which is the ease of processing military experience and prior coursework toward a student's credits; (b) streamlining of programs and services; (c) faculty, advisor, and counselor training; (d) difficulties encountered by veterans, and (e) factors that constitute a veteran friendly campus.

First, veterans need counselors and staff who are specifically trained in understanding and processing military experiential learning and coursework. Veterans need to know that prior coursework and training received in the military is valued by the case institution. Second, veterans need programs and services to be streamlined. Transition programs such as a veteran specific orientation, seminars on PTSD and other veteran specific issues, and a veterans' cohort (learning community) can serve to meet the needs of veterans. Third, an adequately staffed central location is needed to serve as a one-stop shop for benefit counseling, academic advising, and peer support. It would be a place where employees trained in serving veterans can connect these students to external resources. Fourth, faculty and counselor sensitivity training that heightens awareness of the challenges and obstacles to veterans' educational success is needed. Overall, the characteristics of sincerity, respect, affirmation, and helpfulness are key elements in creating a veteran friendly campus and supporting the educational success of community college students who are veterans.

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## Appendix A

### Student Participant Interview Questions

1. What do you feel are your most pressing needs as a veteran attending a community college? Prioritize your list.
2. What difficulties have you encountered when looking into taking classes, when enrolling, and when taking classes at the community college?
3. In your experiences, what programs and services at the community college have been most helpful to you? Where did you get the information that made you come to your conclusions?
4. Conversely, what programs and services at the community college have been least helpful to you? Where did you get the information that made you come to your conclusions?
5. Reflecting on this, what would you recommend as ways the community college could improve the experience of veterans?
6. During this next decade, in what ways do you perceive the community college will meet the needs of veterans?
7. Is there any more information you believe is pertinent to the purpose of the study, which is to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs?

## Appendix B

### Non-Student Participant Questions

1. What do you feel are the most pressing needs of veterans who are attending community college? Where did you get the information that made you come to your conclusions?
2. What difficulties do you feel veterans and active duty students encounter when they look into taking classes or when they are enrolled and taking classes at the community college?
3. In your experiences, what programs and services at the community college have been most helpful to veterans? Where did you get the information that made you come to your conclusions?
4. Conversely, what programs and services at the community college have been least helpful to veterans? Where did you get the information that made you come to your conclusions?
5. Reflecting on this, what are your recommendations for ways the community college could improve the experience of veterans?
6. During this next decade, in what ways do you perceive the community college will meet the needs of veterans?
7. Is there any more information you believe is pertinent to the purpose of the study which is to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs?

## Appendix C

### Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What are the needs of veterans who are attending the community college?
2. What difficulties do veterans encounter at the community college?
3. What programs and services at the community college have been most helpful to veterans? Where did you get the information? What is the basis for your conclusions?
4. What programs and services at the community college have been least helpful to veterans? Where did you get the information? What is the basis for your conclusions?
5. How could the community college improve the college experience of veterans?
6. How do you perceive that the community college will be meeting the needs of veterans within the next decade?
7. Do you feel any clarification of the preceding questions is needed? Do you believe the questions will garner the information required to fulfill the purpose of the study?
8. Are there any other questions you would recommend asking to achieve the purpose of the study?

## Appendix D

## Demographic Questions for Student Participants

Thank you for completing this brief questionnaire for this study. Your time and effort are very much appreciated. Karen Persky.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete the following:

1. Sex: \_\_\_Male \_\_\_Female

2. Please check all that apply:

\_\_\_\_\_ active duty military  
\_\_\_\_\_ veteran

\_\_\_\_\_ Marine Corps  
\_\_\_\_\_ Army

\_\_\_\_\_ Navy  
\_\_\_\_\_ Air Force  
\_\_\_\_\_ Reserves

3. Age Group:

20 – 24 years \_\_\_\_\_  
25 – 30 years \_\_\_\_\_  
31 – 35 years \_\_\_\_\_  
36 – 40 years \_\_\_\_\_  
41 – 45 years \_\_\_\_\_

4. Ethnicity:

Asian or Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_  
Native American or Alaskan \_\_\_\_\_  
Black, non-Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_  
Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_  
White, non-Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please list the last two locations of employment other than the military:

Employer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Job/position Title: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town/State/Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates employed \_\_\_\_\_

Brief Job Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Employer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Job/Position Title: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town/State/Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates employed \_\_\_\_\_

Brief Job Description: \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many years and in what roles have you participated in a community college?

As a present student member of a community college:

*Total Number of Years* \_\_\_\_\_

As a former student in a community college:

*Total Number of Years* \_\_\_\_\_

Other positions in a community college (please specify):

*Total Number of Years* \_\_\_\_\_

7. Have you ever been deployed? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No. If yes, please list all the countries to which you have been deployed.

Deployed

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

7. Have you taken any college online courses while deployed? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No.

If yes, were the courses taken through a community college? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No.

9. Please list all degrees you have obtained, as well as where and when:

|                     | Year  | Degree | School | Location |
|---------------------|-------|--------|--------|----------|
| Bachelor            | _____ | _____  | _____  | _____    |
| Associate           | _____ | _____  | _____  | _____    |
| High School Diploma | _____ | _____  | _____  | _____    |
| Trade School        | _____ | _____  | _____  | _____    |
| Other               | _____ | _____  | _____  | _____    |

10. Average hours worked at job per semester:

|           |       |           |       |       |
|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|
| 1-12 hrs  | _____ | Part-time | _____ | hours |
| 13-20 hrs | _____ | Full-time | _____ | hours |
| 21-30 hrs | _____ |           |       |       |
| Over 30+  | _____ |           |       |       |

and/or Average credit hours enrolled per semester:

|           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| 1-12 hrs  | _____ |
| 13-20 hrs | _____ |
| >20 hrs   | _____ |

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to complete this form. The thoughtful sharing of your experiences are appreciated and are of great benefit to my research.

Karen R. Persky  
 Doctoral Student  
 National-Louis University

## Appendix E

## Demographic Questions for Non-Student Participants

Thank you for completing this brief questionnaire for the study. Your time and effort are very much appreciated. Karen Persky.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete the following:

1. Sex: \_\_\_Male \_\_\_Female

2. Please check all that apply:

- \_\_\_former military
- \_\_\_reservist
- \_\_\_National Guard
- \_\_\_faculty
- \_\_\_administrator
- \_\_\_staff

3. Age Group:

- 25 – 30 years \_\_\_\_\_
- 31 – 35 years \_\_\_\_\_
- 36 – 40 years \_\_\_\_\_
- 41 – 45 years \_\_\_\_\_
- 46 – 50 years \_\_\_\_\_
- 51 – 55 years \_\_\_\_\_
- 56 – 60 years \_\_\_\_\_
- Over 60 years \_\_\_\_\_

4. Ethnicity:

- Asian or Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_
- Native American or Alaskan \_\_\_\_\_
- Black, non-Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_
- Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_
- White, non-Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please list the last two locations of employment:

Employer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Job/position Title: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town/State/Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates employed \_\_\_\_\_

Brief Job Description: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Employer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Job/Position Title: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town/State/Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates employed \_\_\_\_\_

Brief Job Description: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. How many years and in what roles have you participated in a community college?

As a present student member of a community college:

*Total Number of Years* \_\_\_\_\_

As a faculty member in of a community college:

*Total Number of Years* \_\_\_\_\_

As a staff member of a community college:

*Total Number of Years* \_\_\_\_\_

As an administrator in a community college:

*Total Number of Years* \_\_\_\_\_

As a former student in a community college:

*Total Number of Years* \_\_\_\_\_

7. Have you ever experienced a military deployment? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

If yes, please list all the countries to which you were deployed.

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8. Please list all degrees you have obtained, as well as where and when:

| Year | Degree              | School | Location |
|------|---------------------|--------|----------|
|      | Doctoral            |        |          |
|      | Master              |        |          |
|      | Bachelor            |        |          |
|      | Associate           |        |          |
|      | High School Diploma |        |          |
|      | Trade School        |        |          |
|      | Other               |        |          |

9. Average credit hours taught per semester: and/or Average hours worked at job/semester:

| <u>Credit hours</u> |       |                       |
|---------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| 1-12 hrs            | _____ | Part-time _____ hours |
| 13-20 hrs           | _____ | Full-time _____ hours |
| >21 hrs             | _____ |                       |

and/or Average credit hours enrolled in classes per semester:

| <u>Credit hours</u> |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| 1-12 hrs            | _____ |
| 13-20 hrs           | _____ |
| 21-30 hrs           | _____ |
| Over 30+            | _____ |

10. If faculty list subjects you teach or have taught in the community college as well as the length of time you taught that subject.

| <u>Courses</u> | <u>Years taught</u> |
|----------------|---------------------|
| a. _____       | _____               |
| b. _____       | _____               |
| c. _____       | _____               |
| d. _____       | _____               |
| e. _____       | _____               |
| f. _____       | _____               |
| g. _____       | _____               |

Please answer the following questions if you are faculty, staff, or administrator.

11. What departments have you supervised and/or worked in at a community college. Please list all departments throughout your career, as well as length of time (i.e. student services, support services, advising, financial aid, division office, etc.)

| <u>Departments Supervised/worked</u> | <u>Number of Years</u> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| _____                                | _____                  |
| _____                                | _____                  |
| _____                                | _____                  |
| _____                                | _____                  |
| _____                                | _____                  |

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to complete this form. The thoughtful sharing of your experiences are appreciated and are of great benefit to my research.

Karen R. Persky  
 Doctoral Student  
 National-Louis University

## Appendix F

## Informed Consent Participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study that will take place from September, 2008 to January, 2010. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Karen R. Persky, a doctoral student at National-Louis University located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand the study is entitled *Veterans' education: Coming home to the community college classroom*. The purpose of the study is to identify the needs of veterans and active duty military community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs. Specifically, this study will address three questions: (a) What do veterans and active duty students perceive their needs to be at the community college; (b) what programs and services are currently in place at the community college to address the needs of veterans and active duty students; and (c) what are the participants' recommendations for improving the community college experience of veterans and active duty students?

I understand that my participation will consist of audio-taped interviews lasting 1 to 1½ hours in length with a possible second, follow-up interview lasting 1 to 1½ hours in length. I understand that I will receive a copy of my transcribed interview at which time I may clarify information.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time until the completion of the dissertation.

I understand that only the researcher, Karen R. Persky, will have access to a secured file cabinet in which will be kept all transcripts, taped recordings, and field notes from the interview(s) in which I participate.

I understand that the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, but my identity will in no way be revealed. Also, the name of the participant's employers (school) will not be published.

I understand there are no anticipated risks or benefits to me, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be used to assist veterans and active duty military students at community colleges, as well as veteran and active duty students throughout the country.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information I may contact the researcher: Karen R. Persky, [personal contact information was provided]

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact my Primary Advisor and

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Diane Oliver, National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603. Phone (312) 261-3728 or E-mail: Diane.Oliver@nl.edu

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### Informed Consent Focus Group

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study that will take place from September, 2008 to January, 2010. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Karen R. Persky, a doctoral student at National-Louis University located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand the study is entitled *Veterans' education: Coming home to the community college classroom*. The purpose of the study is to identify the needs of veterans and active duty military community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs. Specifically, this study will address three questions: (a) What do veterans and active duty students perceive their needs to be at the community college; (b) what programs and services are currently in place at the community college to address the needs of veterans and active duty students; and (c) what are the participants' recommendations for improving the community college experience of veterans and active duty students?

I understand that my participation will consist of a focus group session which may be audio-taped lasting 1 to 1½ hours. I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time until the completion of the dissertation. I understand that I will receive a copy of my transcribed interview at which time I may clarify information.

I understand there are no anticipated risks or benefits to me, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be used to assist veterans and active duty military students at community colleges, as well as veteran and active duty students throughout the country.

I understand that my identity will be kept confidential by the researcher coding the data and that my identity will neither be attached to the data I contribute, nor stored with other project data. I understand that only the researcher, Karen R. Persky, will have access to a secured file cabinet in which will be kept all transcripts, taped recordings, and field notes from the focus group in which I participate.

I understand that the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, but my identity will in no way be revealed. Also, the name of the participant's employer and/or school will not be published.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information I may contact the researcher: Karen R. Persky, [personal contact information was provided] If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact my Primary Advisor and

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Diane Oliver, National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603. Phone (312) 261-3728 or E-mail: Diane.Oliver@nl.edu

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H

### Interview Protocol Briefing

Thank you for participating in my research entitled *Veterans' Education: Coming Home to the Community College Classroom*. The purpose of this study is to identify the needs of veterans who are community college students and to examine community college programs and services essential to meeting their needs. During the interview I will be asking you questions about programs and services at the community college that address the educational needs of veterans. These questions will be a springboard for discussion that will lead to your recommendations to improving the community college experience of veterans at this institution. Should you not be comfortable answering any of the questions, you can ask to proceed to the next question, or you are free to end the interview at any time. Please know that I will appreciate any additional information you can provide that will help me to better understand your perspective. I will ask you to sign the consent form at this time.

Since your identity will be confidential, I request that you not share your responses to the interview questions. This will help to maintain the integrity of the research. Also, I ask that you agree to answer any follow up question\ I may have at a later date and to review your transcribed answers to the questions.

Before we begin, I have two questions. First, may I record this interview? Second, do you have any questions?

[Interview Questions]

## Appendix I

### Interview Protocol Debriefing

Do you wish to share any more information that would help the progress of this study?  
Do you have any questions you would like to ask me? If you think of anything more you would like to contribute to this study please contact me by e-mail, phone, or in person.  
Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

## Appendix J

## Confidentiality Agreement for Data Transcriptionist

This confidentiality form articulates the agreement made between Karen R. Persky, the researcher, and [NAME OF INDIVIDUAL AND COMPANY OF A PROFESSIONAL TRANSCRIBER].

I understand and acknowledge that by transcribing the audiotapes provided to me by Karen R. Persky, that I will be exposed to confidential information about the research study and the research participants. In providing transcription services, at no time will I reveal or discuss any of the information of which I have been exposed.

In addition, at no time will I maintain copies of the electronic or paper documents generated. Further, upon completing each transcription, I agree to provide the electronic and paper documents to the researcher:

Karen R. Persky

I understand that breach of this agreement as described above could result in personal and professional harm to the research participants for which I will be held legally responsible.

Transcriptionist's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix K

## Confidentiality Agreement for Peer Reviewer

This confidentiality form articulates the agreement made between Karen R. Persky, the peer reviewer \_\_\_\_\_.

I understand and acknowledge that by reviewing the data provided to me by Karen R. Persky, that I will be exposed to confidential information about the research study and the research participants. At no time will I reveal or discuss any of the information of which I have been exposed that pertains to specific individuals or their position at the college.

In addition, at no time will I maintain copies of the electronic or paper documents generated for the purpose of distribution.

Karen R. Persky

I understand that breach of this agreement as described above could result in personal and professional harm to the research participants for which I will be held legally responsible.

Peer Reviewer's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_