11-11-2022

The Effect of a Specifically Designed First-Year Experience Course on Student Veteran Retention and Graduation Rates at a Public University

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The Effect of a Specifically Designed First-Year Experience Course on Student Veteran Retention and Graduation Rates at a Public University

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Leadership in Higher Education

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November 11, 2022

Abstract

According to the United States Congressional Budget Office (2019) nearly $100 billion tax-payer dollars have been spent on education since the passing of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008. That is more than the gross domestic product of at least 130 different countries per the latest World Bank's (2022) rankings. Given the sheer enormity of the figure, one would likely assume that the educational needs of our veterans and their families have been well met if not surpassed. Unfortunately, like many assumptions related to veterans, that would be an inaccurate one. The reality is far more disturbingly elusive than a simple lack of quantifiable data. Higher education as an industry has benefited greatly by the influx of GI Bill revenue but there is little to no evidence to indicate that they have done anything purposeful to ensure the success of student veterans. Even more shocking is the fact that most of the largest benefactors have some of the worst retention and graduation rates within higher education. When examining campus resources designed for marginalized at-risk student groups, there appears to be a disparity between veterans and all others. This study examined the impact of a first-year experience course designed specifically for veterans enrolled at a large flagship state university in the Southeast United States. The retrospective study analyzed secondary data collected over a 10-year period and utilized logistic regression and proportions tests to predict student retention and graduation outcomes. It found that the course did indeed have a significant positive impact on retention but found no significant direct contribution to graduation.

Keywords: Higher Education, First-Year Experience, Student Veteran, Retention

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife and best friend Sherri. It was your sacrifice and support that ultimately made this possible. Every hour spent laboring towards this goal was an hour apart from you and for that I am truly sorry. Your encouragement and love were critical ingredients to the overall success of this project. I could not have done it without you, and I am forever grateful for your support and sacrifice. I love you and hope to follow your example of support as you now begin your own doctoral journey.

I'd also like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents. My mother Mina, who instilled in me a love for books and reading at a very early age. I attribute my desire to be a life-long learner to your initial investment in those Little Golden Books. My father Glen, who passed away in 2008, never finished high school, but instilled in me a work ethic that was certainly needed to accomplish this arduous task. I hope you are proud of me.

Finally, I dedicate this research to all my student veterans that I had the honor and privilege to teach, lead, and mentor, as well as every other student veteran out there pursuing that goal of a college degree. Thank you for your service.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I thank God for the abundant blessings in my life and for Your love and forgiveness. I am nothing without You. There were many times throughout this process that I called on You, and You always answered, "Be still, and know that I am God." You helped me to keep this work in proper perspective to Your work.

I would like to thank my committee, especially my chair, Dr. Grant Smith. I greatly appreciate your tireless efforts to see me through this journey. Your patience, your wisdom, and your encouragement were all delivered with equal skill. I have thoroughly enjoyed our time together in the classroom and have much respect for the example you set. Each of you are a credit to your fields and sterling examples of what it means to be an educator.

I would also like to thank another influential educator in my life, my dear friend Dr. Craig Ashbrook. Craig was my sixth-grade natural science teacher at Cleveland Junior High in Cleveland, Virginia. You have a passion for teaching and a gift for inspiring your students. Thank you for believing in me when I needed it most.

Lastly, this document represents the work of a practitioner, and as such the author has taken some academic freedoms with the language used throughout. It is painfully evident that the academic work done in this area to date has had little to no effect on the outcomes for our student veterans. Thus, any solution of magnitude and scope will not be born within the hallowed halls of the academy. Legislation that both protects and serves our veterans enrolled in higher education is the only plausible and feasible solution to this problem; therefore, this document is written to be consumed by academics, law makers, and practitioners alike.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Overview and Historical Context

America's military and its veterans have consistently sought personal and professional development through academic advancement. In doing so, they have unintentionally helped to shape the landscape of higher education both literally and philosophically. The Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862 provided states with federal land to establish state colleges that would focus on the advancement of agriculture and the mechanical arts, commonly referred to as A&M colleges. Less known, however, is that the federal government also required military tactics be taught, or what we now recognize as the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). This addition to the bill broadened its scope as well as its appeal among law makers, and, due to the ongoing civil war, is likely what garnered the necessary support to be signed into law by President Lincoln (Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities, 2022). The 1862 Act fueled a great expansion in the number of colleges as well as the size of existing colleges in America and more importantly increased accessibility to higher education for those who might not otherwise have had the opportunity (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Higher education's interest in veterans, however, tends to ebb and flow based on the influence of two prevailing external forces. The first being the political and social climate surrounding the state of war or peace at the time, think Vietnam era. The second being the dollar amount of veterans' educational benefits supporting the student, think post WWII and post 9/11. Of the two forces, it would seem the latter has been more dominant in recent history, supported by what Keenan (2015) refers to as the commodification of higher education. In his book, *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics*, he states that the university "aims not at its mission, that is, the education of its citizenry so as to promote the

common good, but at its own financial survival" (p. 174). The for-profit education industry serves as a prime example, and while often admonished by mainstream, traditional higher education, their success is hard to ignore. As a result, many of the for-profit strategies can now be found within traditional brick-and-mortar institutions. Strategies such as reducing the number of tenured professors in exchange for lecturers; increasing administrative staff; and targeting more lucrative students such as international students, out-of-state students, and veterans has become common practice within public higher education (Keenan, 2015).

Veterans' Education Benefits

Federally funded veteran educational assistance programs have been in place since the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (Jenner, 2017; Smole & Loane, 2008; Department of Veterans Affairs [VA], 2020a). The original post-World War II GI Bill reshaped higher education in America and jump-started our country into becoming the economic leader of the world. The massive influx of federal dollars and students doubled higher education's footprint especially among state universities. At its peak, veterans accounted for 49% of all college admissions, and by the time it expired in 1956 nearly half of the 16 million WWII veterans had utilized their benefit for education or training programs. A study of 10,000 WWII veterans found that they outperformed their non-veteran classmates, with an impressive 80% graduation rate (Hagen et al., 1973; Loring, 1971; VA, 2020a).

Subsequent education assistance programs linked to Korea and Vietnam veterans had less overall impact, mainly because they were less lucrative than the original GI Bill and thus fewer veterans chose to take advantage of the benefit. Only 40% of Korea veterans and a much lower 23% of Vietnam veterans utilized their education benefits (Hagen et al., 1973; Kofoed, 2020; VA, 2020a). It was during the Vietnam War and its fallout that tensions between many in higher education and the government and its military culminated. Multiple college campuses became

the epicenter of the country's anti-war sentiment, and the ROTC, as the only tangible sign of the military on campus, became the target of anger and frustration. ROTC was invited to leave many campuses, and several ROTC facilities were vandalized, damaged, or completely destroyed (Coumbe & Harford, 1996). But it was the Ohio National Guard, however, that struck the most damaging blow to campus and military relations when on May 4, 1970, they fired into a crowd of student protestors, killing four and wounding nine (Goings, 1990; Lewis & Hensley, 2021). That tragic event was felt on every campus in America.

Another significant factor to occur post-Vietnam was the military's introduction of the all-volunteer force. The term volunteer stirs up images of selfless Americans doing their part for God and country. A more accurate description of today's forces would be an all-recruited force. Our enlistees are heavily recruited by the military using a wide array of enticements, from large monetary signing bonuses and skills training to lucrative pensions after 20 years of service (Bennett, 2017). High Schools serve as the largest source of recruits for the military, and the most effective recruiting incentives are linked to higher education, such as tuition or tuition loan reimbursement (Congressional Budget Office, [CBO], 1981, 2019). The military's manpower requirements are driven by two factors: operational demand and turnover/retention. There is a direct supply-and-demand correlation between the need for recruits and the incentives used to recruit them. When the military's demand is high, incentive increases usually follow, but the desired outcome is not always guaranteed (Asch et al., 2004; Army War College, 2020).

Post 9/11. Not surprisingly, the Post-9/11 GI Bill or Forever GI Bill is the most robust improvement to educational benefits since WWII, thanks to the manpower requirements of persistent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Veterans Educational Assistance Act, or Post-9/11 GI Bill, was passed in 2008, nearly seven years after the terrorist attacks on America. The

new bill provides 36 months of tuition as well as a living stipend and book money, enough to complete a four-year college education. The biggest difference between this latest bill and all previous is the built-in retention incentive which allowed servicemembers to transfer their benefit to a dependent spouse or child. Utilization of the benefit increased nearly 20% in the first year alone (Radford et al., 2016) and has continued to increase to well over a million recipients, costing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) nine to ten billion dollars annually or nearly 100 billion dollars on educational benefits (CBO, 2019; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Research and Policy Institute [NASPA], 2013; Radford et al., 2016; VA, 2020a). The infusion of the Post-9/11 GI Bill was exactly what the military needed to maintain manpower for another decade-plus of war, but with it also came some unintended consequences, such as the rise of the for-profit education industry.

Higher Education's Response

The For-Profit Education Industry. The fall semester of 2009 saw the first veterans on campus who were fully funded by the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The wait-and-see approach often taken by traditional higher education coupled with the business model agility of the for-profit industry ensured that schools like the University of Phoenix were among the first and largest benefactors. The for-profits have always been attuned to the marketplace and are quick to open new schools, hire faculty, and create and clone programming via web technology, making them the fastest growing category of higher education in the country (Deming et al., 2012). The for-profit education industry had already redirected their recruiting efforts and made the transitioning servicemember their primary target. The University of Phoenix alone touted over 1,000 employees dedicated to the recruiting, assisting, and advising of student veterans (Sewall, 2010). Their technique was to flatter the soon-to-be student by exaggerating the academic value that

their military training and experience provided and then downplay the academic effort required to complete a degree. The message was "easy courses and a fast degree," and they often threw in other incentives such as free textbooks or laptops to sweeten the deal (Golden, 2009). This strategy made the for-profit education industry the top consumer of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and within a year they had enrolled 37% of all student veterans (Anft, 2019) and become the target of an investigation by the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

In May of 2010, the Senate's Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP), led by Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, launched an investigation into the practices and profits within the for-profit education industry (Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2010, 2014; Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions [Senate HELP], 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). The concern was brought on by an unprecedented increase in profits generated almost entirely from the federal government, including the newly approved Post-9/11 GI Bill, since this growth was unparalleled in the history of higher education in America. The obvious concern of lawmakers was that the return on investment was feared to be considerably lower than that of a traditional education. The GAO had been directed to investigate the scope of that investment and how those schools were using taxpayer dollars as well as to identify any gaps in enrollment information that might impede effective oversight. This required comparing the cost of education at for-profits with other colleges in their geographical area as well as examining enrollment and marketing practices (For-Profit Colleges, 2010a; Senate HELP, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). The investigation, led by Gregory Kutz, the Managing Director for Forensic Audits and Special Investigations, ran from May 2010 through July 2010 and was performed in accordance with the prescribed standards of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (GAO, 2010).

The GAO's methodology for data collection was to go undercover, posing as potential students and using hidden video cameras and audio recording devices. The GAO selected 15 for-profit colleges from six states and the District of Columbia as their sample. They also ensured that the colleges selected received 89% of their revenues from federal student aid as reported by the Department of Education (For-Profit Colleges, 2010a; GAO, 2010; Senate HELP, 2010b, 2010c). They also chose a mix of privately held and publicly traded for-profit colleges. To compare relative costs, the GAO simply selected public and private nonprofit colleges in the same geographic area and compared like certificate programs and degree programs up to the bachelor's level (For-Profit Colleges, 2010a; GAO, 2010; Senate HELP, 2010b, 2010c).

The results of the investigation were disturbing to say the least. Over a quarter of the colleges engaged in fraudulent activity by encouraging the prospective student to lie about their financial position on their form for federal financial assistance. This included not only false information in reference to income, but also in reference to number of dependents and the amount of money needed for their education (For-Profit Colleges, 2010a; GAO, 2010; Senate HELP, 2010b, 2010c). In addition, all 15 colleges exhibited some type of deceptive or questionable behavior in front of prospective students. Several of the colleges refused to allow prospective students to speak with a financial aid advisor until after they enrolled for classes. Most were not upfront about the overall cost of the education or led the prospective student to believe that they were getting a good deal compared to traditional education. There were also false statements made in reference to their accreditation, even when asked directly by the prospective student. One school went so far as to say that accreditation is all the same and that they were accredited by the same organization that accredited Harvard (For-Profit Colleges, 2010a; GAO, 2010; Senate HELP, 2010b, 2010c). Other misleading information surrounding

graduation rates and placement after graduation was also common among the colleges investigated.

When it came to comparing costs, the for-profits didn't fare any better in the investigation. The GAO found that tuition, regardless of the type of degree, was more expensive than the closest public college in 93% of all cases (For-Profit Colleges, 2010a; GAO, 2010; Senate HELP, 2010b, 2010c). Despite claims from the for-profit recruiters that their programs were a "good value" or "really low" or "worth the investment," their associated costs were found to be six to 13 times more expensive than their public counterparts (For-Profit Colleges, 2010a; GAO, 2010; Senate HELP, 2010b, 2010c).

The investigation results did highlight positive examples when they were encountered. However, Mr. Kutz's testimony before the HELP committee painted a damning portrait of the for-profit education industry. He concluded that it would likely worsen, as they also discovered that the for-profits used lead-generating websites disguised as college information sites to gain contact information. Each of the fictitious applicants received hundreds of calls not only from the 15 colleges investigated but from numerous other for-profits that share or buy the same prospect information (For-Profit Colleges, 2010a; GAO, 2010; Senate HELP, 2010b, 2010c).

The testimony of Steven Eisman (For-Profit Colleges, 2010b; Senate HELP, 2010b), a financial portfolio manager, compared the for-profit industry to that of the collapsed housing and mortgage lending business. While the for-profit education system catered to just under 10% of the student population, it accounted for 25% of the Title IV dollars spent by the federal government and 44% of the defaults on those loans. Eisman indicated that for-profits seek those with the greatest financial need and put them in the highest cost education (For-Profit Colleges, 2010b; Senate HELP, 2010b). He predicted that students at for-profit institutions would default

on $275 billion in student loans over the next decade (Lewin, 2010). He also pointed out that the

president of the largest for-profit, the University of Phoenix, made 25 times more than the

president of Harvard. Phoenix, which is owned by the Apollo Group, received $1.1 billion in

federal dollars and spent only $99 million on faculty and instructional costs, thus putting nine

cents on every dollar made towards education (Lewin, 2010).

Other damning testimony came from the Department of Education's Inspector General,

Kathleen Tighe (For-Profit Colleges, 2010c; Senate HELP, 2010b). She indicated that the DOE

had an outstanding student loan portfolio amounting to a staggering $600 billion dollars. She

pointed out that 70% of her office's investigations into post-secondary education were aimed at

for-profits. In a later hearing before the HELP committee, the president of The Institute for

College Access and Success, Lauren Asher, testified that the for-profits had the dubious

distinction of having the highest share of students with debt; the highest debt for degree

completers; the worst default rates; the lowest completion rates for bachelor's programs; and the

highest share of private loans (For-Profit Colleges, 2010d, Senate HELP, 2010b).

Fundamentally, the Senate HELP Reports (2010a, 2010b, 2010c) found that for-profit

education costs more than public education on average; targets low-income students, with 95%

applying for federal aid; has high dropout rates; and produces graduates with above average debt,

higher loan default rates, and slower repayment rates. A group of Harvard professors repeated

these findings with their own study published in 2012 in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*

(Deming et al., 2012). They utilized data from both the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data

System (IPEDS) and the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) for 2003-

2004. They did find that the for-profit industry did a better job of retaining and graduating

students enrolled in short-term certificate programs, although they still graduated with more debt

than other students due to the cost of the education they received (Deming et al., 2012). Finally,

a report from the Brookings Institute concluded with its most recent economic study that for-

profit colleges receive a disproportionate amount of GI Bill dollars while graduating fewer

veterans (Kofoed, 2020).

Traditional Brick-and-Mortar Higher Education. Traditional higher education had

long ceded the student veteran market to the for-profit institutions; however, shrinking

enrollment numbers among the traditional high school market motivated many to take another

look (Anft, 2019). But for most traditional institutions it was uncharted territory, and they had

neither a compass nor map. Enter *GI Jobs Magazine*, the creation of Chris Hale, CEO and Navy

veteran (Viqtory, 2022). Viqtory media launched a campaign soliciting higher education at large

to participate in a newly created survey. It was the first of its kind and the model for others that

would soon follow. Originally created as a veteran employment platform in 2001, they saw new

opportunity with the GI Bill and created a survey for higher education. Completion of the survey

ensured receipt of the "veteran friendly" moniker established by the company. They then

provided an opportunity to advertise that newfound status directly to the market, for a fee of

course. Currently, there are at least five organizations promoting and generating lists of the top

military and veteran-friendly schools in the country, each having their own set of criteria

(Kirchner, 2015). Traditional higher education was now an active player in the market, and they

didn't have to be outside the gates of a military installation to have access to transitioning

servicemembers. Another GAO report in 2014 found that nearly a quarter of veterans reported

excessive contacts from schools, and 10% reported feeling pressured to enroll (GAO, 2014).

Offices providing student veteran support started appearing on campuses nationwide, and by

2013 three quarters of institutions were reporting that they had a dedicated staff member or

office focused on the demographic. However, only 25% reported having a detailed understanding

of the demographic, and the vast majority (72%) did not disaggregate retention or completion

rates for student veterans (NASPA, 2013). Initially, these offices were placed under the purview

of admissions or enrollment management due to the heavy recruiting aspect of their mission, and

by 2018 public colleges enrolled 60% of all student veterans (Anft, 2019).

In addition to providing a designated office of support, often referred to as veterans'

centers, some institutions developed veteran-specific programming designed to improve student

veteran academic outcomes. One of the first such programs was the Supportive Education for the

Returning Veteran (SERV) program that originated at Cleveland State University in 2009

(Wood, 2012). Chemistry Professor John Schupp hypothesized that if student veterans attended

class only with other veterans, the same unit cohesion experienced in the military would manifest

itself in the classroom and ensure the success of all members (Wood, 2012). He based this on the

data related to WWII veterans and the first GI Bill, when it was common for classrooms to be

predominantly made up of veterans. The program did meet with initial success, but despite many

accolades and the creation of a national program, most institutions chose not to replicate his

efforts (Schupp, 2013). While the VA encouraged such programs, nothing in the form of

legislation ever emerged from congress. The merit of the SERV program and its success was in

having student veterans together for their first semester on campus during the crucial transition

period (Schupp, 2013). This led to other schools creating their own versions of veteran-specific

first-year experience courses or orientation/transfer courses.

First-Year Experience (FYE) Courses. The freshman or first-year experience

movement dates back to the social and political unrest of the 1960s surrounding the Civil Rights

Movement and the war in Vietnam (Freer, 2016). Following the tragedy at Kent State, students at

the University of South Carolina found themselves confronted by their state's National Guard on campus during one of their protests. A riot ensued and teargas was deployed as students took over the administration building, barricading the university president, Thomas Jones, in his office for 24 hours (Freer, 2016). Following the event, President Jones formed a committee to develop programing that would strengthen relationships between students and the university. One of the programs was the creation of a freshman orientation course called University 101. Professor John Gardner was appointed the first faculty director of the program, and the course was launched in 1972 (Freer, 2016; National Resource Center, 2022). In 1982 Gardner decided to start sharing the success of the program with other institutions and began hosting annual conferences focused on the first-year experience. In 1986, he established the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (Freer, 2016; National Resource Center, 2022).

Given that considerable student attrition occurs during the first year, any efforts to improve transition would be considered most effective when applied during that time (Braxton et al., 2008; Swank & Whitton, 2019). The fundamental underpinnings of what we now refer to as FYE programming is to inspire, support, and create a sense of belonging during transition (Kift et al., 2010). The types of programming vary greatly within higher education, with most focusing on engagement and social integration. The curricula are generally designed to help students build academic skills they will need to be successful at the college level, such as time management, studying and test taking, health awareness, critical thinking, and research fundamentals (Boff & Johnson, 2002). Nearly all colleges (95%) offer FYE classes or seminars which provide scaffolding and mediation in hopes of encouraging students to become more academically

prepared and emotionally engaged and ultimately remain enrolled (Reynolds et al., 2019; Kift et al., 2010).

Student Veteran Success

Is there a problem with student veteran success in higher education? "It depends on who you ask" (Sugden & Kerali, 2013). What is interesting about the topic is the diametrically opposed viewpoints and the distinct lack of accurate quantifiable data. The answer to the question of how many student veterans graduate is, "no one knows" (Shane, 2013). In a 2013 report from a survey of 239 institutions, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators concluded that insufficient data existed to make any accurate determination regarding student veteran success (NASPA, 2013). The reason for the disparity can be traced back to the only two empirical studies of any magnitude that have been conducted: a workforce development study out of Colorado, and the more well-known Million Records Project completed in 2014 by the Student Veterans of America (SVA) organization. The first stated that veterans were experiencing an 88% dropout rate, while the latter reported that number at a much more optimistic 48% (Cate, 2014). Unfortunately, the only definitive conclusion that can be drawn from these vastly different outcomes is that more research is needed.

What we do know is that the most significant change to veteran education benefits since WWII came with the passing of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act in 2008, and over 800,000 veterans have opted to take advantage of this generous benefit (VA, 2020a). Exactly how many have successfully reached their educational objective is unknown and well camouflaged. It wasn't until 2016 that Public Law 114-315 was passed, requiring institutions of higher learning to submit student veteran progress reports, including graduation rates, to the VA (VA, 2017). And while the VA had not historically captured outcomes, they did keep detailed

records of where GI Bill benefits had gone, and from largest to smallest consumers, they were:

online-for-profit; community colleges and technical schools; public universities; and finally

private universities (Golden, 2010; Sewall, 2010; VA, 2020a, 2020b). That order unfortunately is

also the order of worst to best retention rates in higher education (Kantrowitz, 2021a; National

Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021). Increased scrutiny of the for-profit industry did

eventually shift the order to place public universities at the top of the list as a category enrolling

59% of the eligible student veterans in 2019; however, two for-profit schools held the number

one and number three spots as largest independent recipients of GI Bill money with over 30,000

student veterans enrolled between them (Military Times, 2020).

There are several contributing factors to the camouflage of confusion surrounding the

issue. Correlated with the rise of the for-profit education industry is the distinct lack of

responsible and protective legislation surrounding the use of the GI Bill. As mentioned, the first

public law enacted related to accountability didn't occur until eight years after the latest GI Bill

went into effect. Similarly, both the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans

Affairs were slow to react. And finally, there is traditional higher education.

Of all the participants, one might argue that higher education's responsibility is greater

than the others. After all, they are responsible for educating all students that they choose to

admit. And according to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education

(CAS), they are responsible for creating inclusive and diverse environments. They are

responsible for recognizing need among individual students as well as student groups and

providing multiple resources to assist students who might be struggling socially, mentally,

financially, and of course academically (CAS, 2015). They have a special responsibility to

designated underrepresented minority groups; however, most institutions limit diversity to the

five major categories established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB): White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Mukherji et al., 2017; OMB, 2020). Mukherji et al. challenge higher education to redefine diversity beyond the minimum governmental requirements to include other underrepresented and underserved student populations.

Since much of the evidence of this problem resides within the pages of obscure governmental reports, sub-committee transcripts, and scant research projects, it is not well known among educators or veterans. In addition, those who are aware are likely to be the very ones profiting from it. This empirical study examines data collected by the university system to quantify the outcomes of retention and graduation. This effort, and those like it, will help us move beyond the patriotic "veteran friendly" rhetoric to a position of genuine support for our student veterans.

Purpose of the Study

More empirical research is needed on the topic of student veteran outcomes in higher education. The inability of the federal government to account for the billions of dollars spent on veteran education benefits is at best alarming and at worst negligent. To further confuse the issue, there is no consensus among some of the most prominent quantitative research conducted to date. Thus, the existing literature based on quantitative data is divided, with the majority supporting the questionable claim that veterans are more successful in higher education than their civilian counterparts (Cate, 2014). Most qualitative data, however, illuminates and emphasizes the unique challenges that student veterans face and the many obstacles that put them at risk of persistence.

The purpose of this study is to determine if an FYE course specifically designed to meet the needs of student veterans has a positive impact on retention and graduation rates compared to those who did not take the class as well as other student populations on campus. Previously collected anecdotal evidence suggests that the course does have a positive impact on retention, but to date there has been no comprehensive examination of the data related to the course. The university does track such data for freshmen and transfers but does not break it down further. The hope here is that the research results will support maintaining the course as well as encouraging other institutions to implement similar courses.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study began with the simple hypothesis that suggests that a FYE course designed specifically for student veterans does improve retention and graduation rates. The basis for this hypothesis was formed from existing data and literature supporting the positive influence of FYE courses in general within higher education as well as specific to the host institution. In addition, the author had taken a cursory examination of retention on two different occasions over the ten-year life of the course. The hypothesis was investigated by asking four basic questions:

1. What percentage of eligible veteran students enrolled in the 101/201 FYE course?
2. Of those enrolled, what percentage returned for the next semester?
3. How does enrollment in the FYE course impact student veteran graduation?
4. How do participating student veterans' retention and graduation rates compare to nonparticipating veterans and the general student population?

Significance

It is highly likely that the most significant aspect of this study is its retrospective analysis of ten years of data. In addition to adding to the scant quantitative literature, it will bring irrefutable data to the ongoing debate surrounding student veteran persistence in higher education. The issue of veteran success in higher education is fraught with emotion but very little empirical data, much less longitudinal studies or objective studies of any magnitude. This fact is compounded by the politics of the diverging opinions and questionable motivation behind existing research. This study is an exception among the literature and informs retention practices for this unique student population. Retaining our student veterans helps to ensure that their service was not in vain. The second and third order effects of this study could inspire change that would not only improve student veteran academic outcomes, but also reduce student veteran suicides and create a stronger workforce as well as provide better accountability of taxpayer's dollars.

Context

The data set for this study was collected from a flagship land-grant R1 institution within the Southeast United States. This study draws upon the university's vast reserve of secondary student data, collected from a multitude of input mechanisms such as admissions and enrollment, registrar, and financial aid. The data set covers a ten-year period from 2010 to 2020, although the entire data set could not be considered for analysis due to the lack of the most current retention data. The university's office of Institutional Research and Advanced Analytics provided the data set for this study. All personal identifiers were removed, and the data collection was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. The data was reviewed by the researcher before final delivery in Excel format. Since the data was provided in Excel format, some data transfer and

recoding were necessary to ensure SPSS could analyze the data. Some data was unavailable or unretrievable, such as length of service and combat or non-combat. Multiple sets were created to better manage data related to specific questions for analysis.

Methods

This study used proportions testing as well as logistic regression to predict the probability of retention and graduation for those student veterans who enrolled in the 101/201 FYE course designed specifically for them. Logistic regression was chosen because the dependent variables are binary, and the purpose of the study is to measure the probability of success if the course is taken.

The objective of the study was to determine the effect that the course had on student veterans' persistence and graduation rates. While most existing literature supports the positive influence of FYE programs in general, little is known regarding their influence on student veterans.

Conceptual Framework

The main theoretical approach in the study of retention since the 1970s has been sociological, looking for common behaviors among students who persist that distinguish them from students who leave. However, psychological and sociopsychological approaches, along with educational context, environmental, and cultural factors, have worked their way into new approaches over the years (Bean, 2001). On the topic of student veterans in higher education, several theories come into play including identity theories and intersectionality, communities of practice, socialization theories, and adult learning theory or andragogy.

The model developed by John Bean and Barbara Metzner in 1985 specifically for nontraditional student retention serves as the framework for this study. The United States

Department of Education identifies nontraditional students as having at least one of the following

characteristics: delayed enrollment; works full time; attends part time; is financially independent;

has dependents; or does not have a high school diploma (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). All

student veterans meet the criteria with delayed enrollment alone, but it is what occurs during that

gap that makes for some unique challenges when it comes to integrating into the campus

environment.

Because Bean and Metzner consider the environmental variables to be a much stronger

predictor, low academic variables can be augmented by high environmental variables, and the

nontraditional student is likely to persist. Conversely, if there are low environmental variables,

students are not likely to persist even if their academic variables are high. Given this, it seems

highly probable that a course designed to connect student veterans with one another would

dramatically improve their environment and subsequently lead to more positive outcomes.

Assumptions and Limitations

Given that the topic of student retention is one of the most widely studied areas in higher

education (Tinto, 2007), the primary assumption of this study is that leaders are interested in

improving retention and graduation rates of their student veterans. This in turn leads to the

obvious follow-on assumption that those same leaders are willing to invest in programming such

as the FYE/transition course to achieve that improvement. According to a national ACT survey,

first-year programming that includes FYE courses is among the most significant contributors to

retention in four-year public colleges, and over 20% of respondents listed FYE courses as having

the greatest impact on student retention (Habley et al., 2010).

The primary limitation of this study is that the data represents a single state university

and is not necessarily generalizable to all forms of higher education. The enrollment

demographics are congruent with other large state universities in the Southeast United States; however, they may not be in line with smaller regional state universities or private universities, based on admissions criteria. An additional limitation lies with the accuracy of the data over the ten-year period in question. In the initial stages of the course, the university was not tracking veteran-specific data, so it is very likely that not all student veterans are represented in the data set. There are also other variables that likely contribute to retention and graduation, such as standardized test scores, combat versus non-combat, branch of service, and socio-economic status, which were not examined within the scope of this study. A final limitation is the role of the researcher as the architect and sole instructor over the life of the course.

Key Terms

Active Duty – Those members of the military serving out their contractual service obligations
    full-time on a daily basis. Standard contracts are for four years on active duty followed by
    four years of inactive reserve.

Attrition – The unit of measurement used to determine the rate of dropout of students who do not
    return during their first and second year of college; or the departure from higher
    education prior to completion of a degree or credential.

Hypervigilance – An elevated state of constantly assessing perceived potential threats around
    you; a common symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Military Connected Student – This broad category includes student veterans, military students
    serving in the guard or reserves, as well as military dependents.

National Guard – Those who serve in the Army or Air Force at the state level part-time (one
    weekend per month and two weeks per year). The governor of each state controls their

own national guard but these forces can be federalized and called to active duty by unit or

individual.

Persistence – The continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any institution of higher

education.

Post-9/11 GI Bill – The latest educational benefit that came out of the Veterans Educational

Assistance Act of 2008. The benefit provides veterans with 36 months of tuition as well

as a monthly housing allowance, based on zip code, and a book stipend.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – A mental health problem that is often a result of

experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, like combat, a natural disaster, a car

accident, or sexual assault.

Reserves – Those who serve in the military part-time (one weekend per month and two weeks

per year). The reserve forces supplement the active duty and are paid by the federal

government.

Retention – The continued enrollment within the same institution. Normally measured fall to

spring semester and again for fall to fall semester, as most attrition occurs within the first

year (two- or four-year degree).

Student Veteran – A student who has previously served in the military prior to enrollment.

Transfer – A student who was previously enrolled at another institution of higher education,

regardless of earned credit.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) – An injury to the brain that affects how the brain functions. TBI is

normally a result of a violent blow or blast in the case of student veterans who saw

combat.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review that follows may differ somewhat from the traditional review in that it examines multiple topics that are inextricably connected to the research hypothesis and the overall subject of student veteran retention in higher education. Each of the subject areas covered will provide necessary current and historical context and are integral components to the overall problem being examined. This study is the culmination of a decade's worth of work in the field of student veteran support. The work itself not only led to the research hypothesis but it also helped to develop the breadth and depth of this review. Its contents have shaped the researcher as well as the very curriculum taught in the course being examined by this research. It is intended to provide the reader with sufficient information to make an informed decision regarding student veteran outcomes in higher education and subsequently the impact of this research on the existing literature as well as current retention practices.

Comparatively, there is very little literature on the topic of student veterans in higher education. There is, however, an abundance of literature on the multiple student demographics that intersect with student veterans, such as nontraditional, adult learner, transfer, first-generation, and online students. This review will examine each of those demographics and their higher education outcomes. The review will then look at student retention theories dating back to the 1970s, with a special focus on those related to adult learners or nontraditional students. Finally, the review takes measure of FYE programs, specifically FYE courses, commonly referred to as orientation or transition courses, in higher education and their impact on retention and graduation rates.

Review of the Initial Research

Not surprisingly, the bulk of the research regarding veterans in higher education spans the last two decades, following the terrorist attacks on America on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or more accurately, since the influx of veterans into higher education as a result of the passing of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008. Much of the quantifiable data related to student veterans comes directly from the VA as well as other governmental agencies such as the GAO. In addition, there exists ample qualitative research that examines the experiences of student veterans in higher education. This review will include both quantitative and qualitative data related to the topic, although emphasis is given to empirical research outcomes.

Workforce Development Study

The study that ignited the debate over student veteran success in higher education was produced by the Colorado Workforce Development Council and submitted via the University of Colorado, Denver to the HELP committee in 2012. The report stated that 88% of student veterans were dropping out of higher education before completing their first year and that only 3% were graduating (Briggs, 2012; Sugden & Kerali, 2013; Wood, 2012). Despite multiple Freedom of Information Act requests to all parties involved in the creation of the report, the original study remains unattainable. The subsequent blowback and follow-on reporting, however, does suggest that many were not pleased with the findings. The UC Denver study prompted swift emotional reactions from several veteran advocacy groups but little or no data to refute the findings, which is not surprising, given that the data simply did not exist at the time.

Million Records Project (MRP)

The Student Veterans of America (SVA) were the most outspoken critics of the work-force development study. The SVA is a 501 non-profit organization that was formed in 2008 and claims to represent 750,000 student veterans with chapters on 1,500 campuses (SVA, 2022). The SVA and its executive director, Michael Dukdak, publicly denounced the research and immediately set out to disprove its findings (Shane, 2013, Sugden & Kerali, 2013). They hypothesized, based on a 2010 national survey of veterans and Census Bureau data, that at least 60% of veterans were graduating from higher education, which was above the national average of 54% (Sugden & Kerali, 2013). Given the fact that only 11% of the respondents to the survey reported having served after 9/11 and the GI Bill didn't appear until 2009, their hypothesis wasn't exactly representative of the student veteran population in question (Sugden & Kerali, 2013). But they had struck the first blow against the workforce development study.

Their next report would be a full-on attack, not just against the findings but also the motivation behind it as well as the overall credibility of the study. What followed became known as the Million Records Project (MRP), a research effort in partnership with the VA. The project was made possible thanks to Google and a $3.2 million grant that was divided among four organizations: SVA, the Posse Foundation at Vassar College, Syracuse University's Institute for Veteran and Military Families, and Veterans of Foreign Wars. The SVA received the largest portion at $1.5 million (Sander, 2013). The MRP examined just under 900,000 student veteran records held by the VA (Borsari et al., 2017). Unfortunately, the VA did not record outcomes at the time, so the SVA had to request outcome data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). The NSC is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization that provides educational reporting, data exchange, verification, and research services (NSC, 2022). The research project

immediately became flawed because all of the data stored by the NSC is completely voluntary, and schools that did not make their retention and graduation rates part of the NSC public record were not represented. In other words, the exclusion of several schools created an unequal chance for completion data to be obtained for each student file, which would have created bias and threatened the validity of the research (Beaudry & Miller, 2016; Creswell, 2009). The category of schools least represented of course were those with the poorest outcomes, mainly the for-profit education industry. The summary of the MRP findings were two-fold: first, the majority were graduating, and second, they were graduating from public universities (Cate, 2014). The majority was defined as 51.7% or, comparatively speaking, a 48% dropout rate vs. the workforce study outcome of 88% (Cate, 2014). Unfortunately, all that can be derived from those vastly different outcomes is that more research is needed, and this is exactly what the VA's deputy undersecretary for economic development said about the MRP during a Congressional subcommittee hearing on the topic of student veteran success (House of Representatives, 2014). The second finding, regarding where veterans were graduating, should have been the obvious indicator that the research was flawed, for while the VA did not record outcomes, they did record who was receiving VA benefits. The top consumer by far at the time was the for-profit industry, followed by community and technical schools, and then public universities, and finally private universities (Senate HELP, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). Given that the order of consumption was also the order for worst to best retention and graduation rates, it seemed unlikely that the majority of student veterans were graduating from public universities, a question that was raised in *Military Times* magazine (Altman, 2014). The SVA's executive director, Michael Dukdak, went on to become vice president of military and veterans' affairs for the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU). The APSCU would change its name in 2016 to Career

Education Colleges and Universities (CECU), but its mission remained the same, which is to serve as the "national voice for the for-profit higher education sector" (CECU, 2022; Fain, 2016). While officially categorized as a trade association, their website indicates interaction with the federal government with regard to establishing legislation, which would also make them a lobbying group according to federal government guidelines (CECU, 2022; Senate, 2022). Mr. Dukdak's career change should have raised even more questions, but little to no effort was made by the federal government, higher education, or veteran service organizations to scrutinize the MRP and its findings. Instead, it is likely the most widely cited quantitative research within the literature.

Student Veteran Intersectionality

While more research is certainly needed, we do have substantial data regarding the many larger overlapping student demographics: nontraditional/adult learners, first-generation, transfers, and online students. We know for example that the retention rates for all these student demographics are below the national average of 60% for the traditional student (Golden, 2010; Kantrowitz, 2021a; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022a). Given that all student veterans are within at least one but more likely multiple categories, it could be reasonably assumed that their retention rates would therefore also be lower than the national average. Basically, everything we know about the topic of retention in higher education would leave us to believe that any demographic of student that identifies or intersects with an at-risk population would also share those same risk factors. It is more likely than not in fact that they would have a multiplied risk. According to Kimberle Crenshaw, the Columbia and UCLA law professor who coined the term intersectionality, those who are multiply-burdened are generally

left behind, for their experience is not just the sum of its parts (Crenshaw, 1989; Jenner, 2017; Steinmetz, 2020).

Nontraditional/Adult Learner

Exactly what constitutes a nontraditional student has been the source of much debate in higher education research (NCES, 2021). The term nontraditional once captured any student that didn't arrive on campus in the fall following their high school graduation ceremony or basically any student that was not traditional. Traditional students are between 18 and 24 years old, attend classes full-time, live on campus, and are dependent upon their parents (Pelletier, 2010; Remenick, 2019). As access to higher education increased with the expansion of online education, the definition of nontraditional expanded with it. The United States Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics define nontraditional students by at least seven characteristics: delayed enrollment by a year or more after high school, part time enrollment, financial independence from their parents, having dependents or being a single parent, working full-time, or did not receive a high school diploma (NCES, 2021; Remenick, 2019).

Nontraditional student enrollment has been on a steady incline over the past several decades, with some now suggesting that 75% of all enrolled students would be considered nontraditional (NCES, 2021; Remenick, 2019). Despite the preponderance of nontraditional adult students on campus, many of the traditional educational institutions have not acknowledged their presence. According to an American Council on Education survey, at least 40% of institutions indicated that they did not market to adults nor have any programming or services specific to the needs of adult students (Chen, 2017).

Adult learners have been designated as such primarily because of their age and lived experiences (Remenick, 2019). Through the theory of andragogy, Knowles (1980, 1984) established a set of principles related to teaching adults:

- Need to know – adults prefer to know why they are learning

- Readiness to learn – adults return to school because they have a specific goal

- Orientation to learning – adults are focused on learning for doing more than knowing

- Motivated – adults are generally more internally motivated

- Self-direction – adults see themselves and desire to be self-directing

- Experienced – life experiences are a resource and sometimes a barrier to learning

The National Center for Education Statistics data indicates that 33% percent of the 2019 enrollment of nearly 20 million college students were 25 years of age or older (NCES, 2021). According to the U.S. Department of Education Adult College Completion Tool Kit, approximately two-thirds of adult students 25 or older do not persist in postsecondary education long enough to earn a credential (Tolbert, 2012). The many challenges facing adult students have been well documented in the literature, and most agree that nontraditional adult learners or independent students are therefore less likely to graduate (Bowers & Bergman, 2016; Chen, 2017; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Hanover, 2018; Hardin, 2008; Jenner, 2017; Kantrowitz, 2021a, 2021b; Knowles, 1980, 1984; Knowles et al., 2020; NSC, 2019; Rabourn et al., 2018; Remenick, 2019; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

They become even more at risk when they choose an academic environment that puts little effort into making adult learners feel that they belong at the institution. These barriers to persistence fall into four general categories: personal, financial, psychological, and academic (Hanover, 2018; Remenick, 2019). Personal barriers are those competing priorities in an adult

student's life, work and family being the two most prevalent among adult learners. Financial barriers can be the costs associated with navigating the personal barriers as well as the costs of college attendance. There may also be issues qualifying for financial aid due to income and or debt. Psychological barriers are those associated with the adult learner's fear of failure. They may also suffer a fear of technology or simply lack confidence in their study and academic skills. Academic barriers are those posed by the curriculum itself. Most curriculum design as well as delivery is done with the traditional student in mind.

Student veterans are nontraditional by all definitions. The first and most obvious is that they all share a gap between high school and college in which they served their country. The average military service obligation set by Title 10; Section 651 of U.S. Code is four years (Department of Defense, 2021). Any gap of one year or more makes graduation 50% less likely (Kantrowitz, 2021a, 2021b). They are also far more likely (47%) to have a family, be first-generation (62%), have a job, and commute than their traditional classmates (VA, 2022). However, not all student veterans would be considered adult learners based solely on age. While the Department of Education and other agencies consider students 25 and older as adults, student veterans can be as young as 22 or 23 when entering college and as old as 40, with 62% being under 25 (Lyon et al., 2017; VA, 2022). Most agree however, that the life experience of a student veteran tends to make them mature for their age. Cleary and Wozniak (2013) make a strong argument not only for considering student veterans as adult students but also approaching adult education from something other than a deficit model by focusing on the very attributes that make them adult learners through a more positive lens.

First-Generation

      As already noted, 62% of student veterans are first-generation students (VA, 2022). A first-generation college student is defined as a student whose parents did not attend college or attain a bachelor's degree (Ma & Shea, 2021). Nearly three quarters of all college dropouts annually are first-generation (Kantrowitz, 2021a). As such, this population of students has gained the attention of higher education, as marked by the increasing literature as well as services and programs aimed at their successful retention and graduation. The data and subsequent literature show that these students tend to differ from their peers in several areas, including racial/ethnic demographics, socioeconomic status, and academic preparation, and thus face greater challenges and barriers in achieving their academic and career goals (Ishitani, 2006; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). First-generation students tend to work more hours per week than their counterparts, which impacts their ability to connect to their peers and the campus community. They are less likely to take humanities and arts courses and more likely to major in fields that lead directly to employment. They also face the distinct divergence of maintaining a sense of belonging with their families and friends back home, grappling with stressful events without their families, and wrestling with their own identities (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). All of these challenges add up to a lack of cultural capital across social classes, which can lead to dropping out. In their quantitative study of longitudinal data from 18 four-year colleges, Pascarella et al. concluded that the level of parental postsecondary education had significant influence on the academic selectivity of the educational institution attended, the nature of their college experiences both academic and nonacademic, and to a modest extent the cognitive and noncognitive outcomes of college (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Transfer

Transfer students make up 38% of all students in higher education (Tugend, 2018; Shapiro et al., 2018). Because there is no real federal accountability for transfer students, higher education historically has treated them as an afterthought, devoting little to no resources to them and causing the Association of American Colleges and Universities to include them in their list of underserved student populations, alongside minorities, first-generation, and poor (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2021; Finley & McNair, 2013). With the decline in the traditional student pipeline as well as the dwindling international student interest, some institutions are paying a bit more attention to the transfer student lately.

The Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) at the National Center for Education Statistics defines a transfer student as any student who enrolls in an institution of higher education with prior post-secondary experience, regardless of the amount of earned credits (NCES, 2019). The emphasis is clearly placed on experience rather than credit. Current practice for most institutions, however, requires students to complete a negotiated number of credits in order to be considered a transfer student (Brown & Rhodes, 2016). This is particularly true for student veterans, who all receive college credit for their military experience. The Department of Defense pays the American Council on Education (ACE) to review all military training and make academic credit recommendations (ACE, 2022). These recommendations are denoted on what is called a Joint Service Transcript (JST) (ACE, 2022). Air Force veterans are the exception, because they receive a Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) transcript. CCAF is the largest accredited community college in the country (Air University, 2022). The Air Force is uniquely positioned to do this because of their preponderance of high-tech jobs and the caliber of recruit required to perform them. Individual institutions determine whether to accept

all of the recommended credit, some, or none. Those institutions eager to recruit veterans tend to be more liberal in following ACE recommendations (Golden, 2009). The obvious issue is that while they may have recommended credit on paper, they are lacking in higher education experience and thus, unlike all other transfer students, there is no correlation between earned credit and post-secondary academic achievement.

Most of the literature is in agreement that not only are transfer students underserved but they are also at risk and less likely to graduate (Duggan & Pickering, 2008, Hoyt & Winn, 2004; Kantrowitz, 2021a; Monroe, 2006). Transfer students historically come from two primary sources, two-year institutions such as community and junior colleges and other four-year institutions. In fact, more first-time students begin their education at public two-year institutions than four-year, 41% vs 38% (Shapiro et al., 2018). Unfortunately, half of the million-plus students that drop out of college annually are enrolled in an associate degree program, and only one in five will graduate with a bachelor's degree (Kantrowitz, 2021a). Veterans too are attracted to community colleges and technical schools and enroll in especially high numbers, based upon GI Bill expenditures (VA, 2017). Given the large overlap in student demographics and characteristics, this fact is not a surprising one.

Regardless of their origin, transfer students frequently bring with them an assortment of barriers to academic success and retention, and nearly all encounter what is commonly referred to as "transfer shock." Transfer students can be married with children, single parents, single with no children, employed full-time or part-time, or attend school full-time or part-time. In other words, transfer student characteristics are across the spectrum, but they are more likely to be older, be minorities, work at least part-time, have weaker academic backgrounds, and be less confident in their academic abilities (Monroe, 2006). The vast majority, nearly 95%, transfer

before earning an associate degree or certificate (Shapiro et al., 2018). In the case of student

veterans, "learning shock" would be a more accurate description of entering post-secondary

education. As Blaauw-Hara (2017) accurately acknowledges, the learning environment and

theoretical foundations of the U.S. military do not align well with those in academia.

Online Students

Distance learning/distance education have been around for well over 100 years and the

concept long before that (Oosterhof et al., 2008). Early writers such as Dohmen, Peters, and

Moore (as cited by Keegan 1996), recognized the fundamental separation of teacher and learner

but focused on the virtues of independent self-study and the freedom to learn outside the

confines of the traditional system. However, as technology advanced and the industrial

revolution took a firm hold of the United States, many writers emphasized the importance of

media, technology, and the ability to mass produce learning materials into their definitions.

Peters, much to the chagrin of many of his fellow educators, went so far as to refer to this as the

industrialization of distance education (Keegan, 1996).

Peters' statement would turn out to be more prophetic than he may have realized, as the

internet brought to life seemingly unlimited possibilities. In 1989, the for-profit University of

Phoenix became the first fully online institution of higher learning offering both bachelor's and

master's degrees (OnlineSchools.org, 2022). The business model seemed much better equipped

to operate within the fast-paced realm of the virtual world than that of the traditional, much more

methodical shared governance of the brick-and-mortar Ivory Tower. For-profit education became

synonymous with online education as the industry disproportionately flourished, enrolling only

6% of all students but 24% of fully online students (Protopsaltis & Baum, 2019). However, their

financial success could not be ignored, and online education has been the fastest growing

segment of higher education over the past two decades, with nearly one in three students

currently taking at least one online class and 96% of traditional universities offering at least one class in online-only format (Deming et al., 2012; Fain, 2019; Senate HELP, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; NCES, 2021; OnlineSchools.org, 2022). Unfortunately, the success of online education as measured by retention and graduation rates has historically and consistently lagged behind traditional education by at least 15% and in some cases as much as 33% (Deming et al., 2012; Fain, 2019; Golden, 2010; Senate HELP, 2010b). Outcomes are especially bleak for at-risk student populations and those with less academic preparedness (Protopsaltis & Baum, 2019).

There has been a steady decline in the number of veterans enrolling in online for-profit education due to the scrutiny of lawmakers and other governmental agencies. In 2012, 40% of all student veterans enrolled in college were enrolled in online for-profit institutions. By 2016 that number had dropped to 30% (Kofoed, 2020; VA, 2020a). The Department of Defense banned the University of Phoenix from taking federal tuition assistance dollars and recruiting on military installations in 2015 (Douglas-Gabriel, 2015). While the ban was not permanent, it did dramatically slow continued enrollment. The VA followed suit in 2020, ending GI Bill revenue for Phoenix as well as four other for-profits (VA, 2020b). In addition to the GAO investigation, the Federal Trade Commission conducted an investigation into the recruiting tactics of the University of Phoenix and levied a record $191 million fine (Federal Trade Commission, 2021). Other contributing factors include the rise of non-profit online education opportunities like University of Maryland Global Campus, Southern New Hampshire University, Liberty University, and Grand Canyon University, as well as online options among state and private universities (Fain, 2019; Protopsaltis & Baum, 2019).

While it may be expected that the for-profit education industry turns a tidy profit, given their name, what should be unexpected is just who they make that profit from. Studies conducted

regarding the demographic make-up of the online student body characteristics reveal that the prime candidate is older, married, low-income, minority, and less academically prepared (Cochran et al., 2014; Deming et al., 2012; Kofoed, 2020; Protopsaltis & Baum, 2019). Kofoed (2020) also demonstrated that veterans who had scored low on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) were the most likely to enroll in for-profit colleges.

Cultural Divide

In addition to the complex intersectionality with other at-risk student categories, student veterans bring with them the shared experience of military service. All student veterans, regardless of branch of service, career field, or level of academic preparedness, were socialized into a culture that is vastly different from that of higher education. They have all survived a 6–12-week crucible of indoctrination that is purposefully designed to strip away one's personal identity and replace it with that of a soldier, sailor, airman, or Marine (Gade & Huang, 2021). Two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan have ensured that many of our veterans have experienced man's most brutal creation, combat. Many student veterans have been exposed to physical and emotional stress, and as a result many suffer from PTSD. One of the most common symptoms of PTSD is depression, and Medley et al. found that 83% of their 211 survey respondents screened positive for depression. Other common obstacles include substance use disorder (SUD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), moral injury, military sexual trauma, and other cultural stressors unique to the military (McMurray, 2007; Medley et al., 2015). Psychologists refer to such experiences as turning points or transitions. A turning point is a specific occasion or event that changes the course of one's life, while a transitional event is marked by profound changes in external circumstances and daily life (Gade & Huang, 2021). It is likely that all student veterans have experienced one or both before arriving to campus. Thus, the further

removed their military experiences were from college life, the more challenging their transition

is likely to be.

More prevalent and perhaps more damaging than the effects of combat on some are the

perceptions that all student veterans face on campus. The gap continues to widen between those

who have served and those who have not, and now more than ever before veterans are looked at

through a lens of apathy, suspicion, or even distain (Gade & Huang, 2021). Another byproduct of

the all-volunteer force is that the military is increasingly middle class, from the South and

Midwest, and politically center-right (Gade & Huang, 2021). According to a Pew Research

Center study conducted in 2011, 84% of post-9/11 veterans reported feeling that the general

public did not understand the problems they and their families faced, and 71% of the general

public agreed (Kirchner, 2015). The general public would include the campus environment as

well as professors. When compared to WWII, when nearly 12% of Americans served and almost

every American household was impacted by the war in the form of service, rationing, victory

gardens, or women in the workforce, today's public is unlikely to have a servicemember in their

immediate family, as less than one half of one percent wear a uniform (Gade & Huang, 2021;

Census Bureau, 2022). This gap in first-hand knowledge and understanding permeates the

environment student veterans transition into. The student veteran's stressors are then

compounded by the perceptions that faculty and staff do not understand military culture and may

view veterans as traumatized and possibly dangerous (Osborne, 2016). A national poll completed

in 2012 found that over half of those surveyed believed that the "majority" of Iraq and

Afghanistan veterans suffered from PTSD (Gade & Huang, 2021). Very few researchers have

attempted to measure faculty attitudes and behaviors towards veterans. What has been done

indicates that professors who are more conservative, teach at community colleges, and have had

contact with the military outside of academia tend to be more aware and supportive of the needs of student veterans (Gonzalez & Elliott, 2014).

Even less research has been attempted to address how teaching and learning differ in the two environments, or what Blaauw-Hara (2017) more accurately refers to as communities of practice. The military educates and trains its members differently because it is hugely invested in the process and its outcomes. The system reflects decades of experience in educating and training mass numbers of students in the most effective and efficient manner possible (Fletcher & Chatelier, 2000; Army War College, 2020).

All personnel entering military service must complete and pass the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test (ASVAB). The score received determines the jobs that are available to the enlistee. The military has this process down to a science, and very few recruits are ever reclassified due to an inability to complete their training for cognitive reasons. The military primarily operates on a pass/fail system. They also build retraining and retesting into the curriculum in order to ensure maximum completion rates (Fletcher & Chatelier, 2000; Army War College, 2020).

This obviously differs greatly from higher education, where the onus to learn is placed squarely on the student. The way higher education approaches teaching and learning is vastly different and thus creates "learning shock" (Blaauw-Hara, 2017) for student veterans. It is not a matter of simply having a gap since high school, but rather leaving one highly structured community of practice for a completely different community of practice. Thus a student veteran may be more familiar with the highly structured environment of the military, where conformity and strict adherence to the rules guides their actions. This includes a lockstep approach to the execution of tasks as well as learning new material. As the environment of academia is one of

creativity, individualism, and independence, it may be interpreted as unclear, lacking detail, and rife with poor leadership (Falkey, 2016).

Navigating the Divide

The literature related to this transition from soldier to student is growing, especially within the social sciences and among qualitative researchers. Although limited, there does exist a collection of quantitative literature on the factors that impact student veteran success in higher education. One of the more common limitations is sample size, given that most studies occur within the boundaries of a single institution or campus. A few studies have managed to overcome this limitation, such as Semer and Harmening's (2015) work in the state of Ohio. Their study used a quantitative, non-experimental design to examine the influence of multiple characteristics on the academic success of first-year student veterans in higher education. Those characteristics included: demographic, academic involvement, faculty interaction, student interaction, and social involvement. The study reportedly represented a population of 4,000 first-year veterans attending colleges and universities throughout the state of Ohio. The data was collected via a questionnaire, and a blocked form of stepwise regression analysis was used to determine which variables, if any, predicted academic success. The empirical investigation included statistical, mathematical, and computational techniques.

The theories chosen by the researchers to comprise the analytical framework for this study were Astin's student involvement theory and Schlossberg's transition theory. Astin defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience." Schlossberg's theory highlighted four types of transitions: (a) anticipated, (b) unanticipated, (c) chronic "hassles," and (d) nonevent. These theories served as the backdrop to the following research questions:

1. What demographic characteristics, if any, impact the academic success of first-year veterans?

2. What between-college characteristics, if any, impact the academic success of first-year veterans?

3. What academic involvements, if any, impact the academic success of first-year veterans?

4. What faculty-to-student interactions, if any, impact the academic success of first-year veterans?

5. What student-to-student interactions, if any, impact the academic success of first-year veterans?

6. What co-curricular involvements, if any, impact the academic success of first-year veterans?

The regression analysis identified seven significant predictor variables that influence academic success as defined by grade point average (GPA): (a) student veterans that self-identify as non-white, (b) the number of credit hours taken, (c) talking to faculty about career aspirations, (d) receiving oral feedback from a faculty member about academic performance, (e) attending events on campus, (f) exercising or participating in physical activities, and (g) time spent commuting to class. Somewhat surprisingly, the two greatest positive predictors of academic success were receiving oral feedback on performance and participating in physical activities. The other significant variables proved to have a negative influence on academic performance.

Another multi-campus quantitative study was completed by Williams-Klotz and Gansemer-Topf (2017) from Iowa State University. They examined how the experiences and relationships of military-connected students were associated with their overall academic success as measured by GPA. This multi-institutional quantitative study considered academic, financial,

social, and personal experiences as well as relationships between students, and between students and professors. The single research question that drove the study was: What academic, financial, social, personal, and relationship factors are associated with cumulative GPA for military-connected students attending 4-year institutions?

The theoretical framework behind the Iowa State study was the student veteran academic and social transition model developed by Livingston et al. in 2011. The model identifies four factors that influence transition: (a) cornerstones, (b) auxiliary aid, (c) environment, and (d) navigating reenrollment. In this study, sampling was somewhat problematic, but in the end 1,197 military-connected students were surveyed and 310 (26%) responded. The institutions included two public research universities; two master's-level institutions, one public and one private; and two private baccalaureate colleges. All institutions were predominantly White institutions (PWIs). All data was collected during the Spring 2014 semester using the Survey of Veteran and Military Students (SVMS) and was part of a larger research effort.

The model accounted for a significant proportion of variance (25%) in cumulative GPA among five variables. First, identifying as a student of color was negatively associated with a high GPA. Second, attending a private institution was positively associated with a high GPA. Third, experience determining educational benefits was negatively associated with a high GPA. Fourth, experience meeting professors' expectations was positively associated with a high GPA. Finally, feeling academically prepared to enter the institution was positively associated with a high GPA. While not all findings were surprising, the data does support much of the research related to student success not specific to the military-connected. It also sheds light on the importance of academic preparedness, as well as the influence of the professor in the classroom.

Qualitative research makes up the lion's share of the literature related to student veteran transition and success in higher education. And while it certainly adds rich and thick descriptions of lived experiences, it is lacking in quantifiable outcomes related to persistence and retention. Most of the research is in complete agreement that student veterans face a long list of unique challenges and obstacles specific to them. The more robust studies tended to involve more than one researcher and thus more than one perspective. A standout among the qualitative literature is a study conducted by the Office of Naval Research (Lim et al., 2018). This interpretative phenomenological qualitative study examined the implicit cultural values and expectations embedded in faculty and staff's perceptions of student veterans and how those perceptions function as hidden curriculum working against student veteran transition into higher education. This unique study opted to depart from the bulk of the literature that simply approaches this topic from a deficit perspective, assuming that it is the student veteran and their characteristics and challenges that must be addressed by student affairs personnel and their resources. Instead, the researchers took a critical look at the culture of higher education and the expectations generated as a result. It then contrasted them with the culture and expectations of the military and the student veterans it produces.

This study by Lim et al. was funded by the Office of Naval Research and was conducted at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The qualitative study included in-depth interviews with twenty student veterans as well as nine faculty and staff members. The researchers adopted interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to examine how the participants interpret their life experiences and construct meaning from them. Their data analysis produced two major findings of divergence: (a) definitions of self-sufficiency and (b) concepts of leadership and accountability. The military culture operates within clear, concise, and specific

guidance for all task or mission completion. When a student veteran doesn't receive that in the classroom, they perceive it as poor leadership/communications, and when they ask for clarification, professors perceive that as a lack of self-sufficiency or worse a lack of intelligence. This clash of culturally produced expectations always puts the student veteran at a distinct disadvantage. Another example is when a professor might perceive a student veteran to be a strong leader in a group setting, but the student veteran's definition of leadership is more team oriented. The student veteran is not used to having members of the team who are unwilling, unmotivated, or too immature to see the benefit of teamwork.

The theoretical framework for the Lim et al. study was also unique in that the researchers chose Durkheim's sociological perspective of education from the 1970s, in which he argued that schooling serves primarily to socialize students into productive citizens. This process involves two distinct dimensions: (a) formal acquisition of knowledge and skills and (b) the informal process by which students learn social norms and values. The elements of socialization that take place apart from the formal curriculum are known as hidden curriculum (Durkheim, 1973, as cited in Lim et al., 2018).

The greatest limitation of the Lim et al. study was the sample and how it was chosen. There was little to no gender or racial diversity, and all students were enrolled as undergraduates in the College of Engineering, making generalization of their findings difficult. More empirical research is needed in this area to raise awareness that student veteran success within higher education is not simply about fixing the veteran and more about a more humanistic approach to examining the campus culture and the expectations it produces. By raising cultural competence on both sides, we could create campus and classroom environments that were not just veteran friendly but conducive to overall more positive classroom outcomes.

Most of the qualitative literature is consistent in the identification of common barriers such as: (a) social interactions with other students or isolation; (b) financial stress; (c) experiencing culture and or role differences; (d) limited resources or access to existing resources; (e) interactions with professors or graduate assistants; (f) competing priorities such as family or work; (g) lack of academic preparedness; (h) time management; (i) lack of community; and (j) depression or other PTSD related issues (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018; Borsari et al., 2017; Cox, 2019; Falkey, 2016; Ford & Vignare, 2015; Jones, 2013; Medley et al. 2015; Olsen, et al., 2014; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Sportsman, & Thomas, 2015; Zinger & Cohen, 2010).

Retention Theoretical Framework

The subject of retention in higher education is probably one of the most researched and talked-about topics in higher education today. In addition to the research, there are books, journals, and a variety of conferences dedicated solely to the topic of student retention (Tinto, 2007). While retention is one of the leading performance indicators when evaluating or comparing our colleges and universities, more practically it is ensuring a consistent revenue stream for the institution. Historically, it has always been thought to be more cost effective to retain students than to recruit new ones, and given current trends, retention is more important than ever. However, despite the plethora of research and theories on the topic, higher education has failed to make any great strides in bringing theory to practice. In the 60s and prior, the academy simply pointed a finger at the students who left and their perceived shortcomings. It was not until the 70s that Tinto (2007) and others thought to take a more reflexive approach by examining the institution and the role of the environment. This led to a tsunami of student affairs staff and programming aimed at involvement/engagement. This also made it clear that the leadership of higher education had decided that retention was a student affairs problem to fix (Tinto, 2007).

The main theoretical approach in the study of retention since the 1970s has been sociological, looking for common behaviors among students who persist that distinguish them from students who leave. However, psychological and sociopsychological approaches along with educational context, environmental, and cultural factors have worked their way into new approaches over the years (Bean, 2001). The dominating theoretical model on student retention over the past four decades has been that of Vincent Tinto. Tinto's 1975 model stated that students applied the exchange theory in determining their academic and social integration, translated as the level of commitment to the institution. If the benefits outweigh the costs, students remain in college (Monroe, 2006). Tinto based his model off the research of William Spady, who had drawn an analogy between suicide and leaving school: both were seen as departing a social system. French philosopher and sociologist Emile Durkheim had found that people committed suicide because they either lacked the values of their social system or they were not supported by their peers. Spady applied the same concept to retention, then Tinto took it one step farther. Tinto's model was based on this concept of social integration (Bean, 2001). Simply put, Tinto gathered large amounts of empirical evidence that supported his hypothesis that the degree of social integration within the campus community directly influenced the student's level of academic commitment and thus their likelihood of successfully continuing their education (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

Tinto later revised his model, based on new research, in 1993 to include environmental variables and student intentions, and is still considered an expert on the subject of retention today. However, Tinto's model was developed with the traditional student in mind, and while he has adjusted and tweaked it over the years to be more inclusive of other student groups, it is the lack of specificity towards the nontraditional student that eliminated it as the theory of choice for

this research. In addition, numerous studies have cast doubt on the relevance of his model when applied to nontraditional student populations (Monroe, 2006).

Nontraditional/Adult Student Retention Framework

Comparatively speaking, the topic of retention among the nontraditional and transfer student populations has not received as much attention from researchers. This is most likely due to their underrepresentation within traditional four-year campuses historically. However, as previously discussed, this is now the fastest-growing population within higher education today (Hanson, 2020; NCES, 2021; Remenick, 2019). The traditional pathway to college is no longer the most traveled, or more accurately, there are fewer students available to travel as college enrollment has been on a steady decline since 2010 (Hanson, 2020; NCES, 2021). Declining birth rates, changes in financial aid regulations, and the economy have all contributed to this tectonic shift in the foundation of traditional higher education (Remenick, 2019).

The model developed by John Bean and Barbara Metzner in 1985 specifically for nontraditional/adult student retention was selected for this study. The conceptual path model (Figure 1.) indicates that the dropout decision is based primarily on four sets of variables. The first factor is academic performance as measured by GPA. The second factor is intent to leave, which is influenced primarily by psychological and academic variables. The third group is background and defining variables, which include high school performance and educational goals. Lastly are environmental variables, which are expected to have a significant, direct impact on dropout decisions (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Figure 1

A Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition
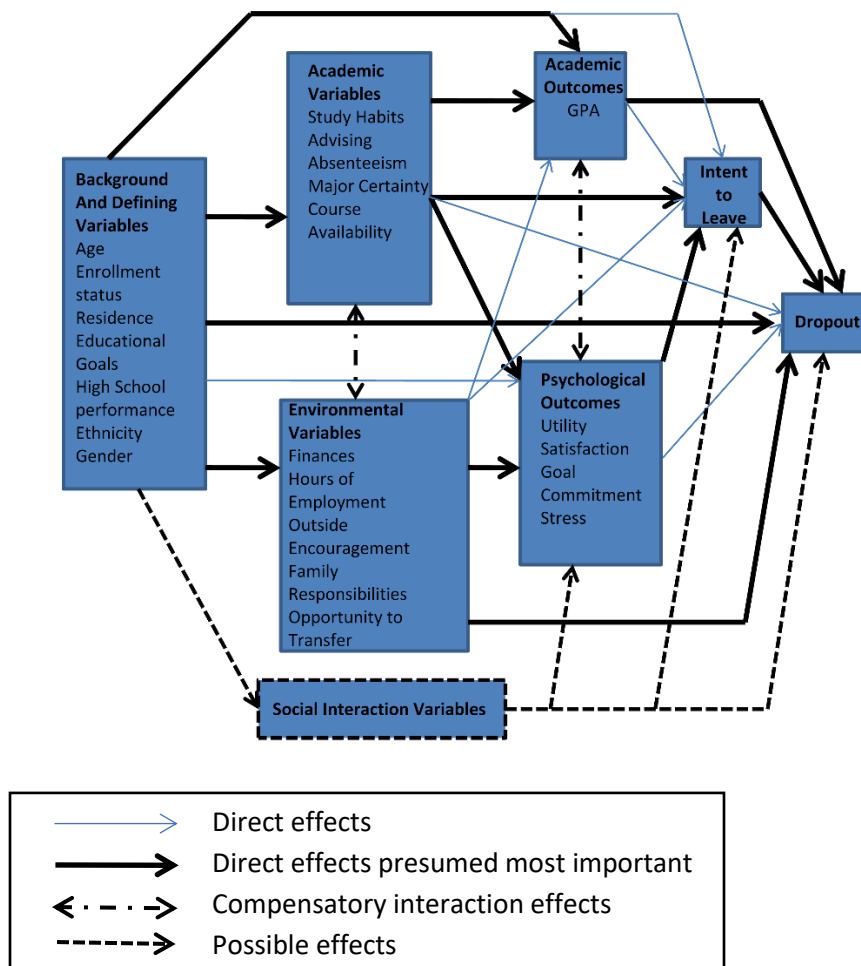
There are also two very important compensatory interaction effects that are included in the model. The first such interaction is between the "academic variables" element and the "environmental variables" element. Because Bean and Metzner consider the environmental variables to be a much stronger predictor, low academic variables can be augmented by high environmental variables and the nontraditional student is likely to persist. Conversely, if there are low environmental variables, students are not likely to persist even if their academic variables are high. The second compensatory interaction is between the "academic outcomes"

element and the "psychological outcomes" element. According to the model, a student with positive psychological outcomes and low academic outcomes is still likely to persist, while the opposite is true for low psychological outcomes and positive academic outcomes.

By using a path model, both direct and indirect effects of a variable could be measured, along with any statistical significance. As a result, Bean and Metzner found that nontraditional student attrition was affected by the impact of the environment more than the social interaction variables that were common with traditional student attrition and proven with Tinto's model (Monroe, 2006). Bean (2001) grouped selected factors often looked at when conducting studies in retention. They are as follows:

- Background Variables – In addition to what would be considered for traditional students, such as educational goals, precollege academic success, and college preparatory curriculum, nontraditional students factors include spouse and family support and employer support.

- Organizational Factors – These include financial aid, programs and policies, counseling, and staff attitudes towards students. Other issues such as parking, childcare, campus safety, class scheduling, availability of services after hours, and costs come into play for nontraditional students.

- Academic Factors – These include courses offered, faculty interaction, advising, campus resources, absenteeism, and academic integrity. In addition, nontraditional students include the expectation for individual faculty member attention.

- Social Factors – These include informal contact with faculty, friendships, identification with a group, and peer culture.

- Environmental Factors – Among the many environmental factors are financial resources, family responsibilities, job responsibilities, and a lack of available options or opportunity.

- Attitudes, Intentions, and Psychological Processes – These include self-efficacy, self-confidence, motivation, stress, alienation, loyalty, sense of fitting in, and intent.

The Bean and Metzner path model does encompass the vast majority of these factors but focuses its attention on the four sets of variables deemed most important: background, academic, intent to leave, and environmental. Several theories come into play including identity theories and intersectionality, communities of practice, socialization theories, and adult learning theories or andragogy. While several have attempted to promulgate a model specifically for student veteran retention, none have the historical evidential support to warrant their consideration.

The research of Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) into nontraditional student retention and the impact of engagement did not fully support Bean and Metzner's conclusions. Their explorative study analyzed the relationship between the university experience of nontraditional students in their first year and progression to second year by examining whether: (a) nontraditional students' backgrounds and personal details are significant predictors of withdrawal at the end of the first year; (b) there are styles of engagement that can prevent withdrawal; (c) perceived social integration and meaningfulness of the learning experience can prevent attrition; and (d) the perceived intensity of the difficulties influences persistence of nontraditional students (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

Their results indicated that nontraditional students struggle more with campus services and that active interaction is strongly related to retention in both traditional and nontraditional students. Nontraditional students attribute more meaningfulness to learning than do their traditional counterparts. And finally, employment can have a negative impact on retention. The

researchers do point out that their results do not support much of the literature's claim of the predictive power of structural variables such as age, high school performance, and cultural level of students' families (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

As previously discussed, nontraditional students can be defined by any number of characteristics and are often separated into categories such as transfer, part-time, and adult, just to name a few. The U.S. Department of Education identifies nontraditional students as having at least one of the following characteristics: delayed enrollment, works full time, attends part time, is financially independent, has dependents, and does not have a high school diploma (Gilardi & Guglielmettti, 2011). Bean and Metzner defined the nontraditional student by focusing on the three primary differences between nontraditional and traditional students: age, residence, and attendance. Nontraditional students tend to be older, live off campus, and take fewer hours than their traditional counterparts (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

First-Year Experience Courses

Among the many retention practices within higher education, FYE courses or freshman seminar courses (University 101) are still considered by most leaders of four-year colleges and universities to be among the most impactful practices. According to a national survey conducted by ACT in 2010, nearly a quarter of all respondents put them within the top three programs, almost 10% higher than the next program considered (Habley et al., 2010). There is some research within the literature that suggests otherwise, however. Jamelske (2008) found no effect on retention but did find that students who took an FYE course had better grade point averages. When the literature is examined as a whole, most agree that FYE courses do improve student retention, especially if those courses are well designed and executed (Reynolds et al., 2019).

According to Gardner (2001), the best designs involve outstanding faculty members, are challenging and credit bearing, and last a full term or longer.

There is far less research and subsequent data related to FYE courses and their impact on nontraditional student retention. Some in fact have found no link between FYE attendance and persistence (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007). It is unclear however, just how much the findings are due at least in part to the FYE course not being tailored to the adult learner. It is also well understood that transition programs within higher education promote retention and graduation rates of student veterans (McMenamin & Kurzynski, 2016). In fact, the American Council on Education has deemed transition courses for veterans as a best practice within higher education (Osborne et al., 2015). It has also been made clear that transition programs intentionally designed to address the transition issues facing student veterans are essential to promoting student success, and yet less than 40% of postsecondary institutions with veterans' services provide such support (McMenamin & Kurzynski, 2016). Most experts agree that institutions should offer exclusive veteran-only first-year seminar courses to foster social support and a sense of belonging as well as learning about the transition experience (Abel et al., 2013; Ackerman et al., 2009; Mentzer et al., 2015; Whiteman et al., 2013).

There is not as much agreement surrounding the topic of course content, however. Most acknowledge that the content is secondary to the act of having student veterans in the same room together (Alexander & Gardner, 2009; McMenamin & Kurzynski, 2016; Schupp, 2013). These types of classes obviously fit within the academic variables of the Bean and Mentzer retention model, but also help to generate positive environmental variables as well as improved psychological outcomes. The greatest challenge with curriculum is that student veterans vary greatly in academic preparedness and experience. McMenamin and Kurzynski (2016) do identify

some general topics that usually appeal to all student veterans, such as navigating the campus

and identifying resources, relearning some academic skills, translating military service and skills,

and career/vocational planning. Their pilot study across five institutions provided the baseline of

understanding of how institutions of higher learning should be implementing veteran-specific

FYE courses. But as Gardner explains, the greatest challenge is not identifying effective

practices for FYE programming but rather shaping the campus culture to adopt such practices

that extend beyond the minimum standard of retention (Alexander & Gardner, 2009; Freer,

2016).

Summary

As enrollment trends continue to decline, higher education's dependence on tuition

revenue will be challenged. It is imperative that institutions look beyond the traditional pipeline

and start investing in the growing population of nontraditional adult learners, of which student

veterans are a part. It is clear from the literature that there is still much to learn about student

veteran outcomes in higher education, with distinct disparity in the research (Altman, 2014;

Borsari et al., 2017; Briggs, 2012; Cate, 2014; Senate HELP, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; NSC, 2022;

Sander, 2013; Shane, 2013; Sugden & Kerali, 2013; Wood, 2012). More quantitative research is

needed to provide campus leadership with the data necessary to make informed decisions

regarding this unique student demographic.

There is sufficient evidence, however, to support the need for special and specific

programming aimed at making student veterans feel welcomed and a part of the campus culture.

There is overwhelming evidence of the many challenges facing not only student veterans, but the

many other at-risk populations that they intersect with. Nearly all of the literature is in agreement

that nontraditional adult learners are an at-risk student demographic, as well as other populations

that include first-generation, transfer, and online students (Bowers & Bergman, 2016; Chen,

2017; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Hanover, 2018; Hardin, 2008; Hoyt & Winn, 2004; Kantrowitz, 2021a, 2021b; NSC, 2019; Pelletier, 2010; Rabourn et al., 2018; Remenick, 2019; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Tolbert, 2012). This evidence should be sufficient to turn the tide on the debate over student veteran outcomes.

Finally, the literature is overwhelmingly favorable regarding FYE programming and its impact on persistence and retention, especially those programs that have been thoughtfully designed and executed as well as programs designed specifically for student veterans (Alexander & Gardner, 2009; Habley et al., 2010; McMenamin & Kurzynski, 2016; Osborne et al., 2015; Schupp, 2013).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

To contribute to the quantitative knowledge, this study began with the simple hypothesis that suggests that a FYE course designed specifically for student veterans does improve retention and graduation rates. The basis for this hypothesis was formed from existing data and literature supporting the positive influence of FYE courses in general within higher education as well as specific to the host institution. In addition, the author had taken a cursory examination of retention on two separate occasions over the ten-year life of the course. The hypothesis was investigated by asking four basic questions:

1. What percentage of eligible veteran students enrolled in the 101/201 FYE course?
2. Of those enrolled, what percentage returned for the next semester?
3. How does enrollment in the FYE course impact student veteran graduation?
4. How do participating student veterans' retention and graduation rates compare to nonparticipating veterans and the general student population?

Chapter 3

Methodology

Overview and Context

The traditional student pipeline for college enrollment has been steadily declining for the past decade, only to be exacerbated by the recent global pandemic. The Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics as well as the National Student Clearinghouse and other agencies that monitor enrollment trends are all in agreement on this fact, although there are varying opinions as to the cause. It is also clear that there is no sea change forecasted anytime in the foreseeable future. (Camera, 2022; NCES, 2021). At the same time and possibly due to the same conditions, the nontraditional student population has been steadily increasing, becoming the majority population enrolled in higher education (NCES, 2021; Remenick, 2019). It is imperative that higher education focus more of its limited resources on retaining those students that do enroll. The literature surrounding the impact of FYE courses on retention is also clear. If they are thoughtfully planned and executed, they will have a positive effect on student outcomes in the classroom, including performance and persistence.

This study is built upon these foundational premises: (a) that retention of all students is a priority for leaders in higher education, and (b) that first-year experience courses are a proven strategy for combating attrition, especially within the first year. The study attempts to bridge these concepts to a unique and underrepresented demographic of adult student learners who are less studied and thus less understood than any other at-risk population in higher education, the student veteran. The study is a ten-year retrospective examination of an FYE course designed specifically for student veterans at a flagship land-grant R-1 university in the Southeast United States.

Background

The host university for this study has offered some form of FYE course for nearly three decades, including those targeting specific majors such as engineering as well as those targeting specific student demographics such as student athletes. Despite the overwhelming success of the program as measured by first to second semester retention rates, the course was never made a freshman academic requirement, primarily based off student feedback. Instead, academic advisors strongly encouraged certain students deemed more at-risk to take the course.

The veteran-specific orientation course was piloted in 2010 as a result of the establishment of a veterans resource center on campus and some version taught every subsequent semester through Spring 2021. While the standard university-approved 101/freshman and 201/transfer curriculua served as the foundation, student feedback was collected and incorporated into the course content each semester, resulting in a curriculum that specifically addressed student veterans' needs (see Appendix A). The course also underwent a series of administrative adjustments. It began as a 101 pass/fail, part-of-term course then shifted to a 100-level experimental course and finally emerging as a 201, graded, full-semester course per the original design.

Course Description

The objective of the course was to improve student outcomes by introducing students to a wide array of resources in addition to the veterans resource center as well as tips and techniques for academic success. The course was a full-semester, graded, two-credit-hour course designed around the needs of adult learners with military experience. Through lectures, discussions, exercises, and assignments, this course helped students reach the learning outcomes listed below:

- Articulate the purpose and nature of a college education at a research university.

- Explain the purpose and goals of the University's general education/core student learning outcomes.

- Apply learning strategies for achieving academic success such as study skills and information literacy.

- Locate and use designated resources both on and off campus.

- Recognize personal and social issues that student veterans often face in a traditional college environment and be able to identify and select appropriate campus resources.

- Evaluate various on-campus and off-campus activities (one campus event, one cultural event, one lecture, and one Student Success Workshop) for academic, social, and professional development.

- Learn the value of forming relationships with other students, faculty, and staff.

- Identify and utilize learned military skills and experiences to successfully negotiate academic challenges.

- Identify and select relevant sources of information related to veteran suicides in America and draw conclusions from analysis and evaluation of that information.

- Construct an effective resume and cover letter that accurately translates military skills, both hard and soft, into easily understood corporate/industry language.

Hypotheses

The pre-study hypotheses for this research were based on the literature pertaining to FYE courses as well as the cumulative experiences of the researcher as a student veteran, an FYE instructor, and veterans resource center director. The hypotheses were that student veterans

present a unique challenge to traditional higher education based on their lived experiences; that these experiences create obstacles and barriers to persistence and graduation; and finally that an FYE course designed specifically for student veterans that helps overcome those obstacles and barriers will improve retention and graduation rates. The null hypothesis is that an FYE course designed specifically for student veterans will have no measurable impact on retention and graduation rates. Retention for this study is measured as returning/enrolling the following semester at the same institution. Graduation is measured as completion of degree program at the same institution.

Subject Data

The subjects of this study included student veterans and military students enrolled in a flagship land-grant R1 state university in the Southeast United States between the 2009-2010 and 2020-2021 academic years. In collaboration with the university's office of Institutional Research and Advanced Analytics, all identifiable student data were removed, and each subject assigned an individual case number. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from both the institution collecting and storing the data as well as the institution in which the researcher is enrolled. IRB exemption was approved at both institutions based on the use of secondary, non-identifiable student data.

Data Collection

This study draws upon the subject university's vast reserve of secondary student data. The data for this research was originally collected and housed by the university's office of Institutional Research and Advanced Analytics. The researcher provided a list of potential research questions and desired variables to be examined, along with an IRB approval letter. Through several conversations, viable parameters were identified, and queries run to produce the

desired data set consisting of over 1,200 cases. All personal identifiers were removed prior to analysis. Although a wide array of demographic data was collected, three variables serve as the primary components of this study; enrollment in 101/201, retention to the next semester, and degree awarded. The other demographic variables provide additional opportunities for further research as to further explain any variance in the outcomes. Since the data were provided in Excel format, some data transfer and recoding were necessary to ensure SPSS could process the data. The data set spans a ten-year period from 2010 to 2020, although the entire data set could not be considered for analysis due to the lack of the most current retention data.

Data Evaluation

When evaluating secondary sources, Stewart and Kamins (1993) recommend answering the following questions:

- What was the purpose of the study?

- Who collected the information?

- What information was actually collected?

- When was the information collected?

- How was the information obtained?

- How consistent is the information with other sources?

Not all the questions are relevant for this study, but with any research utilizing secondary data, often referred to as "dirty data," there are associated risks. Thus, a careful examination/evaluation of the data was necessary to determine the overall quality by examining the validity, reliability, and accuracy of the data. According to Pierce (2008), validity is simply the relevance and appropriateness of the data in relation to the research questions. Given that the data were produced based upon the parameters provided by the researcher, it is likely that the

data are indeed valid. Reliability of the data is linked directly to the reliability or trustworthiness of its source (Pierce, 2008). The office of Institutional Research and Advanced Analytics is the institution's main source of student data as well as the primary supplier of data to university leadership as well as outside authorities. There is no reason to question the reliability of the source; however, Pierce (2008) also makes it clear that consistency is the primary measure of reliability. There is some concern regarding consistency in the data, as student veteran status was not recorded by the institution prior to 2009. Subsequent collection of that information was a process that began with the admissions application and thus did not capture student veterans who were enrolled at the time. Finally, accuracy is the data's sensitivity to change (Pierce, 2008). The researcher did not change or manipulate the data; however, most military students identify as veterans and are coded as such and included in this study.

Variables and Measures

The subject data set captured all student veterans enrolled at the university within the prescribed period. The FYE course was launched in the fall semester of 2010 and was taught every subsequent semester through spring semester 2021. However, data from Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 were not included in the analysis due to significant changes in the class environment. Due to an unfortunate oversight, the university failed to register incoming student veterans for the course, resulting in little to no enrollment; secondly, the class was moved to an online format due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The independent binary predictor variable for this study was that of enrollment in the FYE course as indicated by 0 for no and 1 for yes. The binary outcome or test dependent variables analyzed were retention, as defined by continued enrollment in the following semester,

and graduation, as defined by degree completion at the same institution. Both dependent variables were also represented by 0 for no and 1 for yes.

Research Questions

In an effort to add to the limited quantitative knowledge surrounding the topic of student veterans in higher education, this study began with the simple hypothesis that a FYE course designed specifically for student veterans does improve retention and graduation rates. This hypothesis was born out of the existing literature supporting the positive influence of FYE courses in general within higher education as well as specific data related to the host institution. In addition, the author had taken a cursory examination of retention on two separate occasions over the ten-year life of the course. The hypothesis was investigated by seeking to answer four basic questions:

1. What percentage of eligible veteran students enrolled in the 101/201 FYE course?

2. Of those enrolled, what percentage returned or were retained for the next semester?

3. How does enrollment in the FYE course impact student veteran graduation?

4. How do participating student veterans' retention and graduation rates compare to nonparticipating veterans and the general student population?

Analysis Design

The quantitative study utilized parameter estimation, logistic regression, and proportions testing to address the primary research questions and hypothesis. Parameter estimation was used to determine enrollment and retention rates. Independent sample proportions analysis was conducted using SPSS to compare the outcomes of the two predictor variables, enrolled and not enrolled, on the likelihood of being retained and graduating. This test of comparing means simply counts the number of successes from the number of trials to reveal a proportion or

percentage and then compares the two groups. Similarly, a logistic model was used to determine the probability of an event occurring where the event is categorical, and in this case a dichotomous yes or no outcome for both dependent variables. The logistic regression model used for the analysis is as follows:

$$\log\left(\frac{\hat{p}}{1-\hat{p}}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1$$

Where the natural logarithm of the odds ratio is equivalent to a linear function of the independent variables. Or the logarithm of the probability of an occurrence over the probability of a non-occurrence equals the model significance plus the predictor significance.

Summary

Given the declining enrollment of the traditional student population, it would appear to be in the best interest of higher education to retain as many students as possible, especially those students who pay the non-discounted cost of tuition. Well-designed and -executed FYE courses are a popular retention strategy within higher education. To determine if this strategy holds true with nontraditional students, this study examined the impact of a specially designed FYE course on student veteran retention and graduation rates, utilizing a logistical regression statistical model. The FYE curriculum was designed to mitigate some of the unique environmental challenges facing student veterans in higher education and thus in theory should reduce student attrition. The study set out to measure the effect of the FYE course on retention and graduation rates. For the purposes of this study, 4-year graduation rates were used versus the now prevalent 6-year graduation rates used in higher education. The justification for this being the simple fact that the GI Bill is designed and funded to pay for four years of college, not six.

Chapter 4

Results

Overview

This study set out to contribute to knowledge and quantifiable data related to student veteran retention and graduation rates in higher education. The retrospective study analyzed the secondary data related to 1,188 student veterans enrolled in a flagship land-grant R1 institution in the Southeast United States between 2010 and 2020. The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of a FYE course designed specifically for student veterans on student retention and graduation rates.

The secondary data analyzed was taken from the host institution's vast reserves of collected student data and all identifiers were removed before analysis occurred. The data analyzed consisted of 1,188 individual student veterans, with the majority of 946 student veterans having not enrolled in the FYE course, while 242 veterans did enroll. This study used logistic regression, parameter estimation, and proportions testing to predict the probability of retention and graduation for those student veterans who enrolled in the FYE course.

Descriptive Statistics

All variables included in the study were binary, utilizing a dichotomous scale where 0 = no and 1 = yes. Means, standard deviations, and frequency counts for the enrollment variable (FYE course) and the dependent variables (Graduation) and (Retention) are recorded (Table 1). Of the 1,188 cases, 1,041 were recorded as student veterans. The remaining 147 students were active members of the Reserve or National Guard forces and were included in the analysis, as most military students identify as veterans (Table 2).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	n	M	SD
FYE Course	1188	.204	.403
Graduation	1188	.418	.494
Retention	1188	.683	.466

Table 2

Frequency Table - Is a Student Veteran

	Frequency	Percent
No	147	12.4%
Yes	1041	87.6%
Total	1188	100%

Overall retention rates for the student veteran population indicate that 68% were retained for the

follow-on semester (Table 3). Overall graduation rates for the student veteran population indicate

that 50% graduate (Table 4).

Table 3

Frequency Table – Retained for Follow-on Semester

	Frequency	Percent
No	377	31.7%
Yes	811	68.3%
Total	1188	100%

Table 4

Frequency Table – Graduated

	Frequency	Percent
No	468	50.2%
Yes	464	49.8%
Total	932	100%

Measures of Association

An examination of the correlation between the variables: Enrolled, Retained, and Graduated found positive correlations between Enrolled FYE and Retained ($\phi = .080$, $p < .001$) as well as Retained and Graduated ($\phi = .413$, $p < .001$). Both associations support existing literature. However, correlation between Enrolled FYE and Graduated was not significant (Table 5).

Table 5

Phi Coefficients measuring association

	Enrolled	Retained	Graduated
Enrolled	1		
Retained	.080**	1	
Graduated	.003	.413**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). $n = 1188$
Note: Bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples, 95% CI

Research Question 1

In answering research question number one, "What percentage of eligible student veterans enrolled in the FYE course?" the data set was adjusted to remove the last two semesters of data. The latter data was not considered for analysis because the test environment was radically altered due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While a few students did enroll in the online format, the data was deemed inconsistent with the purpose of this study.

Overall, just over 20% of the eligible 1,188 student veterans enrolled in the FYE course over the life of the course (Table 6). The range of enrollment during that time was from 4.8% to a high of 33.1% (Table 7). The institution's decision to pre-register students for the course account for most of the enrollment increase beginning in the fall of 2014. Other factors include the course's change in classification from a 100-level course to a 200-level course and from a

part-of-term course to a full-semester, graded course. Students always maintained the option to drop the course.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics - Enrollment in FYE

	N	Percent	M	SD	Bootstrap[a] 95% Confidence Interval Lower	Upper
No	946	79.6%			.774	.819
Yes	242	20.4%			.181	.226
Total	1188	100%	.20	.40	1.00	1.00

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples
b. N = 1158 results in point estimates of +/- 2.9% @ 95% confidence (Cochran, 1977)

Table 7

Student Veterans Enrolled by Year, 2010-2020

Academic Year	Total Veterans	Enrolled in FYE	Percent
2010-2011	106	15	14.1%
2011-2012	104	5	4.8%
2012-2013	116	8	6.9%
2013-2014	112	10	8.9%
2014-2015	133	37	27.8%
2015-2016	151	33	21.8%
2016-2017	127	42	33.1%
2017-2018	121	39	32.2%
2018-2019	102	25	24.5%
2019-2020	116	26	22.4%

Note. Automatic pre-registration began Fall 2014.

Research Question 2

In answering research question number two, "Of those enrolled, what percentage were retained for the following semester?" a logistic model was used to determine the probability of retention based on enrollment in the FYE class. The results of the SPSS analysis conclude that

enrollment in the FYE course has a significant, positive effect on retention outcomes (Table 8).

What follows are the results of the SPSS analysis.

Table 8

Logistic Regression Results for Retention

Level	B	SE	Wald	*p*	EXP(B) LL	EXP(B)	EXP(B) UL
Constant	.680	.069	97.75	.001	na	2.0	na
Enrolled FYE	.451	.165	7.5	.006	1.14	1.57	2.17

$X^2 = 7.87$, $p < .05$
Cox and Snell = .007, Nagelkerke = .009

The results of the logistic regression reveal that the overall model is significant ($X^2 = 7.87$, $p =$ .006). While the model is statistically significant indicating student veterans enrolled in the FYE class are more likely to be retained, the model effect size is very small with roughly 1% of the variability in retention explained by enrollment in the FYE class. The classification rate is 68% correct. The predictor (Enrolled FYE) is significant at $p < .05$ and the relative effect size Exp(B) is 1.57. Students who enrolled in the FYE course are 1.57 times or 57% more likely to be retained for the follow-on semester. An independent samples proportion test revealed a 76% retention rate for those students who enrolled in the course (Table 10).

Research Question 3

The same model was applied to research question three, "How does enrollment in the FYE course impact student veteran graduation?" For the graduation analysis, fall semester 2017 data was established as the cutoff because students would be scheduled to graduate in spring semester of 2021 and the data set did not contain sufficient information for analysis. Descriptive frequency count put the number of students who enrolled in the course at 184 and those who did not enroll at 748 for a total of 932 for the graduation analysis. Table 9 contains the results of the SPSS analysis on the modified data set.

Table 9

Logistic Regression Results for Graduation

Level	B	SE	Wald	p	EXP(B) LL	EXP(B)	EXP(B) UL
Constant	-.022	.147	.022	.883	na	.978	na
Enrolled 101	.016	.165	.010	.921	.736	1.017	1.404

$X^2 = .010, p > .05$
Cox and Snell = .000, Nagelkerke = .000

The results of the logistic regression reveal that the overall model is not significant ($X^2 = .010, p = .921$). The model effect size is thus nonexistent. The classification rate is 50% correct. The predictor (Enrolled FYE) is not significant and the relative effect size Exp(B) is 1.017. Students who enrolled in the FYE course are equally likely to graduate as students who did not enroll.

To investigate differences in retention rates and graduation rates associated with FYE enrollment, independent sample proportions tests were conducted. The results of the proportions test for retention rates are summarized in Table 10 and reveal students enrolled in the FYE class are retained at significantly higher levels (75.6%) than those that are not enrolled in the FYE class (66.4%).

Table 10

Proportions Test for Retention

				95% CI	
	N	n	p	LL	UL
Enrolled FYE	242	183	.756	.029	.152
Not Enrolled	946	628	.664	.027	.151

p = .028 Wald test with continuity correction

Research Question 4

In answering research question four, "How do participating student veterans' retention and graduation rates compare to non-participating veterans and the general student population?" independent group proportions tests were run in SPSS comparing student veteran outcomes for those who enrolled in the FYE course and those who did not.

The results of the proportions test for graduation rates are summarized in Table 11 and reveal graduation rates for students enrolled in the FYE class (49.5%) are not statistically different for the graduation rates among student veterans not enrolled in the FYE class (49.9%).

Table 11

Proportions Test for Graduation

	N	n	p	95% CI LL	UL
Enrolled FYE	242	91	.495	-.085	.077
Not Enrolled	946	373	.499		

p = .986 Wald test with continuity correction

According to the university's data (Appendix C), retention rates for the overall undergraduate student population from first to second semester are roughly 93%, thus indicating that student veteran retention lags behind nearly 20%, even with the scaffolding provided by the FYE course. That gap is obviously even greater for those who do not enroll in the course. The 4-year graduation rate for undergraduates ranged from 38.5% in 2010 to 53.9% in 2017, with an average of 46.2% during the period. Student veteran graduation rates of 50% are slightly above the average but below the upper parameter. Given that the rates are trending upward, this too indicates that student veterans are behind their non-veteran classmates in graduation rates.

Summary

The FYE course for student veterans was launched in Fall 2010 and offered every subsequent semester until its conclusion in Fall 2020. During that time, nearly one in five student veterans enrolled in the course. In the fall of 2014, the university started automatically pre-registering student veterans for the course based on retention data at the time. Enrollment tripled from 8.9% to 27.8%, with a peak of 33% in 2017.

Logistic regression and proportions testing support the earlier indications that the FYE class has a positive impact on student veteran retention rates. Student veterans who enroll in the FYE course are 57% more likely to be retained than those student veterans who do not enroll in the FYE course. Somewhat surprising is the graduation statistical outcomes. Enrollment in the FYE course had no measurable impact on student veteran graduation outcomes when compared to those student veterans who did not enroll in the FYE course. However, the significant correlation between retention and graduation among veterans supports the importance of retention as a contributing factor towards successful degree completion.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Overview

It should seem obvious that traditional student engagement methods and techniques would fall short when addressing the student veteran population. The literature is abundant and adamant that student veterans face challenges not seen by other students. And while the VA's own Office of Research and Development acknowledges that student veterans are behind their non-veteran classmates in retention and graduation (VA, 2017), the SVA purports the opposite. The overwhelming preponderance of the evidence supports the former and not the latter. However, there is little evidence to suggest that traditional 4-year institutions are placing much emphasis on retaining these students. This could be due to simple economics and a lack of resources, but it is most likely due to the longstanding practice of catering to the traditional student. As Monroe (2006) indicates, nontraditional students are not the preferred students of universities. The numbers have historically been too insignificant to garner much notice. As those numbers continue to increase however, more attention is warranted. The profile of undergraduate education is changing rapidly and now consists of approximately 40% students who are 25 years and older (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019).

Another seemingly obvious point is that student veterans are among the 15% of college students enrolled at public universities that are paying full price for their education (NCES, 2022b), providing a financial incentive to keep them enrolled. This study has demonstrated that a well-designed FYE course can indeed improve retention rates for student veterans. When examining Bean and Metzner's model, it is not surprising to see how and where the course mitigates several of the environmental and academic variables determining dropout.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of a specially designed FYE course on the retention and graduation rates of student veterans enrolled at a flagship state university. Student veterans face many unique challenges in higher education and intersect with nearly every other at-risk student demographic on campus. The study set out to determine if a course designed to mitigate those unique challenges could have a positive impact on student veteran outcomes. The hypothesis was founded on the plethora of existing literature on the topic of FYE courses and student outcomes as well as Bean and Metzner's nontraditional student attrition model. The study also set out to help close the gap in the literature surrounding student veterans and their outcomes via quantifiable data collected over a ten-year period. With the hypothesis being supported as it relates to retention, the ultimate intent of the study is to influence student veteran support and success within higher education.

Research Questions

The hypothesis that an FYE course designed specifically for student veterans would improve retention and graduation rates led to the formation of four research questions:

1. What percentage of eligible veteran students enrolled in the 101/201 FYE course?

2. Of those enrolled, what percentage returned for the next semester?

3. How does enrollment in the FYE course impact student veteran graduation?

4. How do participating student veterans' retention and graduation rates compare to nonparticipating veterans and the general student population?

Statistical analysis in the form of logistic regression and proportions testing were conducted to answer those questions using SPSS and a secondary data file provided by the host institution.

Findings in Relation to Theory

The findings of the study were both expected and surprising. Based on the literature surrounding the impact of FYE courses, it was expected that retention rates were positively impacted by the course in question, especially given that the course was successfully taught for ten years and continually improved upon by incorporating student feedback. Overall, 76% of the students who enrolled in the course were retained for the following semester. While well below the host institution's average of 93% (Appendix C), the figure is above the national public college average of roughly 60% (NCES, 2022a). Graduation rates on the other hand were a bit surprising, with the study finding no statistical significance when compared to those student veterans who did not enroll in the course. This despite the strong correlation between retention and graduation. More research is needed to identify any factors that might help explain the equity.

The FYE curriculum for veterans was designed around the model's Background and Defining variables that might create obstacles to persistence. The veterans' military experience and transition from the military culture to that of higher education was assumed to be the dominant obstacle. Addressing the effects of combat, loss, survival guilt, and veteran suicide were made integral parts of the unique curriculum. The FYE curriculum addresses all the academic variables within the model, plus additional academic variables such as exam preparation, library tour and exercise, time management, writing, and oral presentations. While they may not have a direct effect on dropout, academic variables have a direct effect on academic outcomes, intent to leave, and psychological outcomes. The curriculum also addresses environmental variables within the model, such as ensuring students receive their GI Bill payments, family support, team building, career counseling, and job placement. These variables

have a direct effect on dropout as well as psychological outcomes and are determined by Bean and Metzner to have a much stronger influence on outcomes. There is a compensatory relationship with academic variables indicating that strong environmental variables can offset weak academic variables. One of the more important environmental elements of the course is the creation of community within the student veteran population, as veterans often report difficulty connecting socially with traditional students (VA, 2022). These factors all work to improve psychological outcomes as well as academic outcomes. Finally, the curriculum addresses social interaction variables by introducing students to professors who discuss their expectations in the classroom. These factors strengthen psychological and academic outcomes and thus decrease the intent to leave and reduce dropout rates.

As for the findings regarding the almost identical graduation rates, one can speculate that after the removal of the environmental scaffolding provided by the FYE course, student veterans feel abandoned or disconnected. Or perhaps the lack of variance is associated with factors related to academic preparedness and or standardized test scores. The vast majority of the student veterans elected not to enroll in the FYE class, a decision that may have been driven by academic confidence. Regardless, improved graduation rates are normally correlated with improved retention rates. In other words, retention losses or gains tend to have a cumulative effect on graduation rates. This anomaly is certainly worthy of further research.

Implications

This study may have far reaching implications for those who are concerned about either our student veterans and their success in higher education or the rate of government spending as related to veterans' educational benefits and apparent lack of accountability. For those in higher education who are focused on student success, this study shows that the familiar and long proven

FYE course is not just for traditional freshmen. Student veteran retention can be improved through intentional and specific FYE curriculum design. It is also likely that retention for the many other nontraditional student demographics that intersect with student veterans could be improved as well. It could be argued that student veterans struggle more than most to connect with their fellow students as well as the institution itself, which is often a bastion for anti-war/military sentiment.

The apparent challenge for traditional higher education is to move beyond the traditional student model. Recruiting is not the answer to higher education's enrollment woes; retention is. Designing programs like the FYE/transition programs specifically for student veterans is a great way to address the unique needs of the population. Such courses acknowledge through policy and practice that student veterans/adult learners have other responsibilities and must balance education and real life demands such as work and family. FYE programming has a long-proven track record and should be embraced by all of higher education, especially with at-risk populations such as student veterans.

In Gade and Huang's 2021 work entitled *Wounding Warriors*, they reveal how bad policy and practice within the VA has resulted in creating a culture of disabled veterans not interested in getting better but focused rather on getting more disability benefits. This has led to unprecedented budgets. The VA's budget has doubled every decade since 1940 and in 2021 was $256 billion (Gade & Huang, 2021). It is therefore reasonable to expect that veteran education spending has not been immune from similarly poor policy and mismanagement.

There has been little accountability of the billions of dollars spent on veteran education since the introduction of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2009. The American taxpayer has limited visibility as to how many degrees were awarded or just how many veterans failed to meet their

academic objective because that data was not collected. With more research like this study, both

higher education and the federal government could use evidence-based practice to better manage

veterans' education benefits as well as student veteran outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

There are three primary limitations of the study. The first and possibly most confining is

the sample. This is a subset of the student veteran population in higher education, specifically

those enrolled in a 4-year, undergraduate program at a single state university. While

generalizable to comparable institutions, especially within the Southeast United States, it may

not necessarily reflect other regions of the country or other types of institutions.

Next, the data collected by the university is only as accurate as the information entered

into the many different data collection systems on campus. For example, student veteran status

was not collected in the application process until 2010-2011. No attempt was made to collect that

information from students already enrolled. In addition, not all student veterans identify as

veterans, especially females. Similarly, students who were still serving in the state National

Guard or the Reserves may or may not have indicated that they were a veteran.

Finally, like all research, there is inherent bias. The author and researcher served in the

United States Army and took care of soldiers for over 20 years (Appendix B). The author and

researcher also served as the sole architect and instructor for the FYE course in question for the

decade-long life of the course.

Future Research

This research affirms the preponderance of existing literature pertaining to the positive

impact of FYE programs on student outcomes, when applied thoughtfully and intentionally. It

also suggests that such programs can work with nontraditional student populations if their unique

challenges are considered in the curriculum design process. However, more research is needed. Common variables like gender, race, major, standardized test scores, socio-economic status, and academic preparedness should all be examined. But more importantly, other variables unique to this population should be considered.

Variables Outside the Scope of the Study

It should be noted that there are several variables that likely contribute to the variance in student veteran persistence and retention that are outside the scope of this study, primarily due to having not been collected by the institution. The most notable is the military's individual ASVAB score. These standardized test scores and sub-scores are used by the military to determine one's eligibility for career fields as well as potential officer selection. And as Kofoed (2020) discovered, there is strong positive correlation between ASVAB scores and degree attainment.

Similarly, but not as granular, would be the variable identifying the student's branch of service. Given the test score requirements to enter each branch of service and that the Air Force has its own accredited community college, it is highly likely that student veteran retention examined by branch would reveal correlations with branch and underlying ASVAB test scores.

Another variable is that of combat versus non-combat experience. Those veterans who have experienced combat have the propensity to suffer from a number of combat-related issues including PTSD, TBI, moral injury, physical impairment, hearing loss, hypervigilance, and insomnia. Students suffering from any one or a combination of these symptoms would obviously be challenged in a full-time academic environment (Schupp, 2013).

A final variable not available for examination is length of time in service. Time in service in most cases would be synonymous with the gap between high school and college. The larger

the gap, the least likely the student is to persist (Kantrowitz, 2021a, 2021b; Tolbert, 2012). While age could provide a similar measure of gap, it would not necessarily account for time in service and its accompanying experience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Broader, more quantitative research is needed in the area of student veteran outcomes within higher education. The military culture creates unique challenges for student veterans transitioning into higher education, and because that culture is an enigma to those in academia, very little programming exists to bridge that gap. What does exist tends to place all veterans into the same box, again based on limited knowledge and experience with the military culture. More research is needed to identify and mitigate the many challenges unique to military experience, such as combat and the plethora of traumas that are associated with it. In addition, we need answers to the questions:

- How does branch of service and time in service impact student veteran outcomes?

- How do ASVAB test scores correlate to persistence/retention?

- Do National Guard and Reserve students face similar or different challenges?

Ideally, the VA and Department of Defense should partner with research universities to develop better transition programming based on empirical data and quantitative research. This would ensure that student veterans received the best possible start to achieving their academic goals, regardless of the institution they chose. It would also eliminate or at least reduce the amount of propaganda produced by politically and/or financially motivated individuals and lobbying groups that proclaim to have the best interest of our veterans at heart.

A college education has been the number one recruiting incentive for the U.S. military since transitioning to an "all-volunteer" force in 1969 (CBO, 1981). Millions of America's sons

and daughters have put themselves in harm's way and endured the worst of humanity just to better themselves via a college degree. It seems unfathomable that America would ignore the fact that our veterans are not being as successful as they should be in achieving their goal of becoming a college graduate. However, given the growing chasm between those who have served and those who have not, it is easy to see how that information could be obscured. Now some 22 years past the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the topic of veterans is muted at best.

Any substantial change will likely have to be levied upon the academy instead of originating from within it. New legislation is imperative to protecting both the student veteran as well as the earned educational benefit and associated taxpayers' dollars. A percentage of all GI Bill revenues should be earmarked specifically for student veteran direct support, such as the creation and resourcing of a veterans' resource center on campus as well as FYE programming designed to address the specific challenges that student veterans face. Both have been acknowledged by the VA's Office of Research and Development as improving student veteran retention (VA, 2022). In addition to an FYE course, a second follow-on course is recommended to strengthen student veteran integration and build academic confidence. The course design and objectives should focus on improving cultural awareness and should be open to veterans and non-veterans alike. The cultural gap is simply too large to close within the confines of a single semester. With regard to protecting the benefit, any institution of higher education that is willing and able to spend GI Bill dollars should meet some level of demonstrated competence and credibility before being able to receive that benefit. A 40% graduation rate for example would eliminate most predatory institutions.

As Gade and Huang (2021) rightfully conclude, the goal of any system of veterans benefits and care should be linked to gainful employment for the social good of all citizens. As

such, educational benefits should not be a blank check but rather a specific benefit linked to both a specific need as well as specific aptitude. Just as the ASVAB exam determines what one does in the military, it should also influence what benefit one receives and how that benefit can be utilized. Maintaining a standard for those in service but then declaring every service member to be college material once they exit is setting our veterans up for failure as well as ensuring that hard-earned benefits are squandered.

It will take honest effort to bridge the gap between the cultures of higher education and the military. There are currently too many actors with vested interests, and unfortunately it is the student veteran that suffers. Change can only occur when we move past the rhetoric and focus on the evidence. It seems the very least we could do for those who have donned the uniform of our country.

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Appendix A

Course Syllabus Spring 2020

Class Time: **MW**, 11:00 – 11:50

Class Location: **Erikson Hall, Room 007 (Basement)**

Instructor	**Peer Instructor**
Name: Tony Dotson	Name:
Office: Erikson Hall, 2B	Phone:
Phone: 257-1148	Email Address:
Email Address:	

Office Hours: See me before or after class or by appointment.

Required Readings

Assigned articles and handouts

Course Objective

The objective of the course is to improve student outcomes by introducing students to a wide array of resources as well as tips and techniques for academic success.

Course Description

This course is a full semester, graded, 2 credit hour course designed around the needs of adult student learners with military experience. This course has a proven positive impact on student outcomes in regard to grade point average and retention to graduation. Through lectures, discussions, exercises and assignments, this course helps students reach the learning outcomes listed below.

Course Learning Outcomes

This course is specifically designed to introduce nontraditional, adult student learners to the academic setting known as a traditional college campus. Students will:

1. Articulate the purpose and nature of a college education at a research university.

2. Explain the purpose and goals of the ████████████████ general education (███████) student learning outcomes.

3. Apply learning strategies for achieving academic success such as study skills and information literacy.

4. Locate and use designated resources both on and off campus.

5. Recognize personal and social issues that student veterans often face in a traditional college environment and be able to identify and select appropriate campus resources.

6. Evaluate various on campus and off campus activities (one campus event, one cultural event, one lecture and one Student Success Workshop) for academic, social, and professional development.

7. Learn the value of forming relationships with other students, faculty, and staff.

8. Identify and utilize learned military skills and experiences to successfully negotiate academic challenges.

9. Be able to identify and select relevant sources of information related to veteran suicides in America and draw conclusions from analysis and evaluation of that information.

10. Construct an effect resume and cover letter that accurately translates their military skills, both hard and soft, into easily understood corporate/industry language.

Course Requirements

1. Class participation is critical to the success of students, and it adds to the success of the course. Participation includes being prepared for class, involving yourself in class discussions and activities, assuming responsibility for your own learning, and contributing to the learning of others.

2. Classroom decorum is important to a conducive learning environment. Being respectful of your classmates and instructors includes engaging in civil discourse when we discuss topics that have a diversity of perspectives; silencing your cell phone; not texting; and other behaviors outlined in class.

3. Complete and submit, as directed (electronically or hard copy), all assignments by designated dates and times.

Grading Criteria and Assignment Policy

Assignments	Points Possible
Library Research Assignment	100
Class Participation	100
Email Reflections	100
Resume and Cover Letter	100
30 Second Commercial	25
Time Management Plan	25
Mid-term Grade Assignment	25
Academic Advisor Meeting	25
TOTAL	500

Campus Resources Photo Project	10
Registering with the VA	10
Student Veteran Organization Participation	10
www.███.edu/studentsuccess/workshop-series	10
Office Hours with Professor	10
TOTAL BONUS	50

*If you miss class due to an unexcused absence, your overall course point total will be deducted by 10 points per unexcused absence.

Late Assignments

Students with an excused absence may submit assignments the class period following their absence without any penalty. Assignments turned in late, without an excused absence, will receive a maximum of 50% credit.

Grading Scale

A   90% and higher   (450-500 points)

B   80-89%   (400-449 points)

C   70-79%   (350-399 points)

D   60-69%   (300-349 points)

E   59% and below   (299 points or below)

<u>Final Exam</u>

There is not a final exam.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend **ALL** class sessions. Attending class is an important part of succeeding in any course, especially a seminar/discussion-based course like █████. Please contact the instructor by phone or email prior to class if you are unable to attend. This is good practice for all of your classes by the way. <u>Any class work missed due to absence must be made up and unexcused absences will receive additional work.</u>

Excused Absences

Students need to notify the professor of absences prior to class when possible. S.R. 5.2.4.2 defines the following as acceptable reasons for excused absences: (a) serious illness, (b) illness or death of family member, (c) University-related trips, (d) major religious holidays, and (e) other circumstances found by the professor to fit "reasonable cause for nonattendance." Student anticipating an absence for a major religious holiday are responsible for notifying the instructor in writing of anticipated absences due to their observance of such holidays no later than the last day in the semester to add a class. Information regarding dates of major religious holidays may be obtained through the religious liaison, Dr. ████████████████. Students are expected to withdraw from the class if more than 20% of the classes scheduled for the semester are missed (excused or unexcused) per university policy.

Verification of Absences

Students may be asked to verify their absences in order for them to be considered excused. Senate Rule 5.2.4.2 states that faculty have the right to request "appropriate verification" when

students claim an excused absence because of illness or death in the family. Appropriate notification of absences due to university related trips is required prior to the absence.

Military Activation

If you are a military student serving in the National Guard or Reserve, it is in your best interest to let your professors know that immediately. You might also consider sharing a copy of your training schedule as well as any orders activating you. The Veterans Resource Center (VRC) can provide a letter for your professors validating your absence but be aware that there is no current UK policy protecting military students who miss class due to short term activations such as long weekend drills, annual training, or emergency activations. See the instructor or the VRC for details.

Academic Integrity

Per university policy, students shall not plagiarize, cheat, or falsify or misuse academic records. Students are expected to adhere to university policy on cheating and plagiarism in all courses. The minimum penalty for a first offense is a zero on the assignment on which the offense occurred. If the offense is considered severe or the student has other academic offenses on his or her record, more serious penalties up to suspension from the university may be imposed.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious breaches of academic conduct. Each student is advised to become familiar with the various forms of academic dishonest as explained in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Complete information can be found at the following website: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. A plea of ignorance is not acceptable as a defense against the charge of academic dishonesty. It is important that you review this information as all ideas borrowed from others need to be properly credited.

Part II of Student Rights and Responsibilities

(███████████████) states that all academic work, written or otherwise, submitted by students to their instructors or other academic supervisors, is expected to be the result of their own thought, research, or self-expression. In cases where students feel unsure about the question of plagiarism involving their own work, they are obliged to consult their instructors on the matter before submission.

When students submit work purporting to be their own, but which in any way borrows ideas, organization, wording, or anything else from another source without appropriate acknowledgement of the fact, the students are guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarism includes reproducing someone else's work, whether it be a published article, chapter of a book, a paper from a friend or some file, or something similar to this. Plagiarism also includes the practice of employing or allowing another person to alter or revise the work which a student submits as his/her own, whoever that other person may be.

Students may discuss assignments among themselves or with an instructor or tutor, but when the actual work is done, it must be done by the student, and the student alone. When a student's assignment involves research in outside sources of information, the student must carefully acknowledge exactly what, where, and how he/she employed them. If the words of someone else are used, the student must put quotation marks around the passage in question and add an appropriate indication of its origin. Making simple changes while leaving the organization, content and phraseology intact is plagiaristic. However, nothing in these rules shall apply to those ideas which are so generally and freely circulated as to be a part of the public domain (Section 6.3.1).

Accommodations Due to Disability

If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodations, please see me as soon as possible during scheduled office hours. In order to receive accommodations in this course, you must provide me with a Letter of Accommodation from the Disability Resource Center ███████████ or visit them at 725 ████ Street, Suite 407 Multidisciplinary Science Building, ████████████████████ (Building 82 on the Campus Map).

Veterans Resource Center

If you have questions regarding your VA benefits the VRC is located in the basement of Erikson Hall. In addition to a full complement of staff, the center provides study and lounge space as well as free printing. You can reach the center at ████████ or ██████████████.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Wednesday, January 15: WELCOME ABOARD
Due Today**:** Motivation and a good attitude (feel free to bring that to every class).
For Next Wednesday: Establish Comms – Email #1 me and cc peer instructor, and tell us a little about yourself, why you chose ███ *and your expectations for this class as well as your advisor's name and contact information.*

Monday, January 20: MLK DAY – ACADEMIC HOLIDAY
Due Today: Nothing
For Wednesday: Email #1

[Wednesday is the last day to add a class, withdraw from school or reduce your course load and receive an 80% refund.]

Wednesday, January 22: HURRY UP & WAIT NO MORE – TIME MANAGEMENT
Due Today: Email #1
For Monday: Email #2 – How many libraries does ███ *have?*

Monday, January 27: LIBRARY TOUR
Due Today: Email #2
For Wednesday: Email #3 Reflection, what do you think will be your biggest challenge here at ███.

Wednesday, January 29: STUDENT VETERAN RESOURCES
Due Today: Email #3
For Monday: Bring a sample of your note taking

Monday, Februrary 3: NOTE TAKING TIPS AND TOOLS OF THE TRADE
Due Today: Sample of note taking
For Wednesday: Email #4 Which class will have the hardest exams….why?

[Wednesday is the last day to drop a class without it appearing on your transcript.]

Wednesday, February 5: EXAM PREP…AVOIDING THE CRAM SESSION
Due Today: Email #4
For Monday:

Monday, February 10: TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM
Due Today:
For Wednesday: Email #5 Question – What stresses you out?

Wednesday, February 12: STRESS – AVOIDING TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING
Due Today: Email #5
For Monday: Email # 6 – Reflection – describe the alcohol culture in the military and on campus. If you have no personal experience, what is the perception?

Monday, February 17: ALCOHOL/MILITARY CULTURE
Due Today: Email #6
For Wednesday: Email #7 – Reflection – What do you feel are the underlying causes of military and veteran suicides?

Wednesday, February 19: ADDRESSING VETERAN SUICIDES
Due Today: Email #7
For Monday:

Monday, February 24: QUESTION, PERSUADE, REFER
Due Today:
For Wednesday:

Wednesday, February 26: research day
Due Today:
For Monday: Email #8 Reflection – Compare and contrast diversity in the military to diversity on campus.

[Mid-term grading window opens Feb 25th and closes March 11th at midnight.]

Monday, March 2: DIVERSITY – WHERE DO YOU FIT IN? (group presentation)
Due Today: Email #8
For Wednesday: Email #9: When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Wednesday, March 4: MAJORS AND CAREER PATHS
Due Today: Email #9
For Monday: Email #10 How did you select your major? If you have not declared a major how do you plan on narrowing it down?

Monday, March 9: PROFESSORS
Due Today: Email #10
For Wednesday:

Wednesday, March 11: CAREER CENTER
Due Today:
For Next Monday: Nothing

Monday, March 16: Spring Break

Due Today: Nothing
For Wednesday: Nothing

Wednesday, March 18: Spring Break
Due Today: Nothing
For Monday: Email #11 your courses and mid-term grades found under ▮▮▮▮ *Calculate your GPA using the GPA calculator found at* ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ .

Monday, March 23: PERSONAL BRANDING
Due Today: Email #11
For Wednesday: Email #12 Reflection – Using the three steps from the power point develop your own personal brand.

[Priority registration begins today through the 24th of November.]

Wednesday, March 25: ELEVATOR SPEECH
Due Today: Email #12 Personal Brand
For Monday: Email #13 – Your elevator speech

[Priority registration 25 March – 16 April.]

Monday, March 30: CAREER FAIRS
Due Today: Email #13 Your elevator speech
For Wednesday: Create Handshake account

Wednesday, April 01: NETWORKING
Due Today: Verification of Handshake account via screenshot
For Monday: Create LinkedIn account

Monday, April 06: INTERVIEWING
Due Today: LinkedIn account
For Wednesday: Nothing

Wednesday, April 08: COVER LETTERS
Due Today: Nothing
For Monday: Write a cover letter for an application that you are submitting to the VRC to become a student work-study. Work-studies provide customer service and assist fellow veterans.

Monday, April 13: RESUMES
Due Today: Cover letter
For Wednesday: Nothing

Wednesday, April 15: RESUMES
Due Today: Nothing
For Monday: Resume

Monday, April 20: CAREER SUPPORT RESOURCES
Due Today: Resume
For Wednesday: Nothing

Wednesday, April 22: REVIEW
Due Today: Nothing
For Monday: Any and all due assignments completed and turned in.

Monday, April 27: FINAL CLASS AND AAR
Due Today: Any remaining make up work.

<div align="center">

████████ Research Assignment: Due February 20

</div>

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to provide practice in topical research related to a relatively broad topic. The student must be able to synthesize, compare, and evaluate resources in order to obtain an accurate account of veteran suicides in America. The student will become familiar with ████████ Library and its support services.

> Skills – This assignment will assist the student in developing the following skills related to the information surrounding veteran suicide:
> a) Critical thinking
> b) Analyzing
> c) Synthesizing
> d) Evaluating
> e) Utilizing library resources
>
> Knowledge – This assignment will also increase the student's understanding on the topic of veteran suicide by introducing them to multiple perspectives and sources of data. Complete and thorough examination of other perspectives may cause one to reassess personal viewpoints.

Prompt: The Department of Veterans Affairs recently reported a slight drop in the number of veteran suicides daily in America, from 22 to 20. This announcement has been met with both jubilance as well as cautious skepticism. Many believe that the higher number of 22 is closer to the truth because of the many variables in the way suicides are reported, measured, and accounted for in this country.

Task: Identify the issues surrounding the numbers of veteran suicides in America, using governmental as well as private and public sources on the topic found at ███. Discuss and evaluate the leading contributing factors as well as the most prevalent prevention programs and their outcomes. Choose one of the following perspectives from which to present your analysis and findings, as well as your recommendations on how to improve existing measures: Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of Defense; or the President of ███ with a focus on our own student veteran population.

Mechanics:
Length = 5 pages, not including title page and reference page (see example in resource guide on syllabus)
Spacing = double spaced
Font = size 12 Times New Roman
Margins = 1 inch
Format = APA (see resource guide on syllabus)
Binding = single staple upper left-hand corner
Sources = 5 including at least one from each of the following: Department of Veteran Affairs Report or other governmental report; research articles/scholarly journals; periodical; video-based media. (See resource guide for examples of acceptable academic sources.)

Note: The campus resource guide has been removed from the syllabus as it is not unique to the course.

Appendix B

Position of the Researcher

I transitioned from the Army to a college campus in 1986, with a four-and-a-half-year gap between high school and college. There were no veteran centers at that time, nor much in the way of resources specific to student veterans or adult student learners. I remember feeling very much out of place among the traditional students. I became a Resident Advisor (RA) which helped me to find my position within the student hierarchy on campus. I graduated with honors despite the fact that I was only a slightly above average high school student. I attribute this to my work ethic, as well as finding opportunities on campus to plug into as an adult learner. Such as forming relationships with faculty, staff, ROTC cadre as well as other students.

After 26 years in uniform, I retired and found myself in higher education as the director for a Veterans Resource Center at a flagship state university. I held the job for over a decade and learned much about the many struggles that veterans face in their transition to college. I piloted a first-year experience (FYE) program during the early days of the center and taught it every semester until I departed over a decade later. The program was based loosely on two existing FYE programs, one tailored to fit incoming freshmen and one designed for transfer students. Curriculum from each was incorporated into one course with the addition of instruction specific to veterans. I was the architect and sole instructor for the course, and to my knowledge it is no longer being offered.

Having served over 20 years as a leader of soldiers, it is ingrained in me to look after their best interests, to ensure their success, to council and mentor and guide. I have fought for student veterans' rights and equality among our at-risk student populations. I have a passion that is forged in a fire of personal experiences and hammered against an anvil of blind bias and

tradition within higher education. The result is equally rewarding and frustrating but has clearly

shaped my perspective. In addition, the time spent pursuing a doctorate in Leadership in Higher

Education has afforded me great opportunity to delve deeper into the topic and explore the many

facets of veteran identity and how it impacts transition. As such there is inherent bias built into

this research because it is impossible to separate my veteran identity and the responsibility that

comes with it from my role as the researcher.

Appendix C

Host Institution's Retention and Graduation Rates
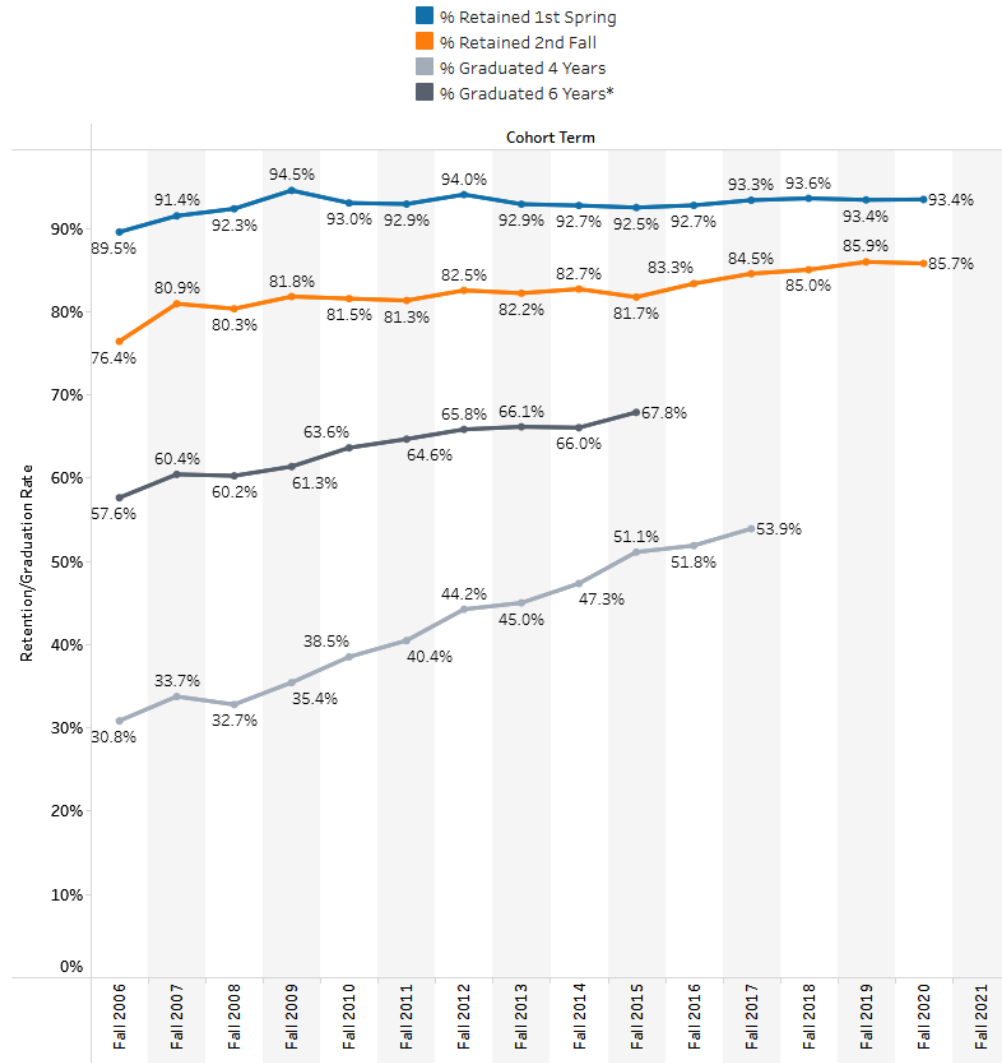
*The 6-year graduation rate of the Original Cohort is known as the Student Right to Know rate.
**URM stands for underrepresented minority. The five ethnicities defined as underrepresented minorities by the Council on Postsecondary Education are American Indian/Alaskan Native, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races.