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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIORS OF WOMEN  
STUDENT VETERANS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Child, Family and Community Sciences  
in the College of Education and Human Performance  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term  
2017

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## **ABSTRACT**

Women with military experience are attending colleges and universities across the United States. It is important to understand how they describe their experiences as students and how their help-seeking behaviors impact their success (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Baechtold & Da Sawal, 2009). Using Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory (1981, 1984) as a framework, this qualitative phenomenological study explored the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. In addition, the events that caused them to seek help and the resources they utilized are described. The research questions were: (1) Does the prior military experience of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help? (2) What are the events that cause women student veterans to seek help? And (3) What are the resources that women student veterans utilize? Using Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this two-phase mixed method design employed a sequential descriptive strategy employing a profile questionnaire and individual semi-structured interviews ( $N=9$ ). The research identified six themes using Schlossberg's framework (1981, 1984). These six themes were: military influence, transitions, times of distress, tailored support, traditional support and support 'from my own'. The findings of this study provide researchers, student personnel professionals, and military educational constituencies with a foundation for policy and programming that account for the help seeking behaviors women student veterans' exhibit as they transition from the military to college.

I dedicate this work to the women who participated in this dissertation. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me both face to face and online.

To all those who serve(d) in the U.S. Military.

Thank you for your service.

I also dedicate this work to my mother Rosalie S. Peters who has passed on from human form into the universe. You were the wind beneath my wings and I hope you can see this accomplishment and be proud. I miss you immensely.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This research is a product of many minds. I am grateful for the inspiration, support and involvement of many contributors who have not only made this journey possible, but also an intimate and intellectual experience I will forever remember.

I first would like to express my gratitude to the student research participants who agreed to be involved in this study. Thank you for candidly sharing your life experiences with me. Your stories are educational and heartwarming.

I would like to express deep gratitude to my dissertation committee, Dr. Thomas Cox, Dr. Carolyn Hopp, Dr. JoAnn Whiteman and Dr. Liz Grauerholz, for their guidance, oversight and encouragement. Sincere appreciation to my committee chair Dr. Thomas Cox, for your support, honesty and leadership. Without your dedication, recommendations and mentorship, I would not have been able to complete this work. I am forever grateful for your time and investment.

My sincere appreciation to those who supported me on this journey including the University of Central Florida administration and staff for approving my sabbatical, time off to work on the manuscript and support along the way particularly Dr. Jeff Jones my immediate supervisor, Dr. Cecelia Rivers my former supervisor and longtime mentor and friend, Ms. Lily Flick my wonderful transcriptionist and editor, and Ms. Laura Wilcox-Curll from College of Ed Graduate Studies who always kept me on track towards completion. Thank you to my colleagues in higher education, for expressing encouragement, being silent cheerleaders and compassionate mentors through this process.

Finally and more importantly to my family and friends who held me up for these past seven years, I appreciate your love and support more than words can say. Mommy, Daddy, Amara, Aden, Ari, Sean, Jay, Tony, Maggie, Sonja, Lyana, Nyree, Taj, Sacheen, The Armstrong Family, Michelle (aka wife), Danae, The Iota Family, and all who have said a prayer, gave me words of encouragement or simply listened to me talk about this experience that I may have missed, I thank you. This work is a combination of all of us. I love you all!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Women veterans are attending college in increasing numbers across the United States (Radford, 2009). As the number of women who join the armed forces increases, so too will the number of women veterans who decide to utilize military educational benefits. The Department of Veterans Affairs Women Veterans Task Force (WVTF) Report informs "...14 percent of active duty and 18 percent of National Guard and Reserves forces are now women" (2012, p. 2). It is estimated the number of women in the military will increase from 1.8 million in 2011 to 2 million by 2020, or 10.7 percent of the total veteran population (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). Unlike in previous wars, women of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars were placed in hostile regions under direct fire and had similar combat experiences as their male counterparts (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Corbett, 2007; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Herbert, 1998; Mattocks, Haskell, Krebs, Justice, Yano, & Brandt, 2012). Combat exposure experiences led to mental health issues, combat-related physical injuries, as well as difficulty transitioning into civilian life and the classroom (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Glover-Graf, Miller, & Freeman, 2010; Herbert, 1998; Vacchi, 2012).

Women student veterans predominately attend college at two and four year public institutions (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011; Queen & Lewis, 2014). The Department of Veterans Affairs (2011) informs that women veterans have educational attainment and complete bachelors or advanced degrees at higher rates than non-veterans

(47 percent compared with 32 percent, respectively). This information suggests that women veterans are not only utilizing their educational benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), but are also successful at completing their education. The women who are enrolled in secondary education are older than non-Veterans with the largest (24%) group being ages 25-34 years old. (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). This can be explained by military enlistment which typically is within the same age range of traditional college freshmen ages 18 to 22 years old. By pursuing higher education during (active duty) and after service, women veterans are given a greater opportunity to assimilate into civilian life (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). The transition process from the military to college is multilayered and often difficult to navigate for many veterans (Vacchi, 2012).

Women veterans face unique and difficult challenges because of their gender and the male-dominated traditions of the military (Ackerman et al., 2009; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Corbett, 2007; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Women veterans show higher rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), sexual harassment, and limited access to and enrollment in Veterans Affairs health care (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Corbett, 2007; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Mattocks et al., 2012; Street, Gradus, Stafford, & Kelly, 2007). Further, women veterans experience gender-based disparities in health care quality, homelessness, needed child care, service-connected disabilities, underrepresentation in memorial services, and are less likely to demand education benefits (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Corbett, 2007; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Mattocks et al., 2012; Street et al., 2007). Additionally, women on active

duty "...have significant pressures of ongoing deployments and temporary duty assignments that often interfere with their availability to participate in voluntary education" (Ford, Northrup, & Wiley, 2009, p. 62). Women in reserve units can be activated and deployed with little notice and no consideration for academic schedules, deadlines, or enrollment status (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Beyond immediate requirements for food, shelter, and clothing, women veterans need to juggle a variety of needs. These needs include privacy, gender-related care, and treatment for physical and sexual trauma, as well as housing support and care for dependent children (Washington, Yano, McGuire, Hines, Lee & Gelberg, 2010). When combining personal needs and the experience of entering an academic environment which they may not have experienced before, women student veterans feel added pressure.

As more women join the military, are deployed, serve in war zones, and transition to the classroom, the demand for specialized support services in higher education will also increase (Ackerman et al., 2009). Based on the literature, colleges will need to develop programming that addresses the many difficulties that women veteran students face (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Ford et al., 2009; Glover-Graf et al., 2010; Queen & Lewis, 2014; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Vacchi, 2012; Washington et al., 2010). For many women student veterans, ongoing deployments interfere with participation in education programs. Women veteran students must also navigate the academic bureaucracy of military credits being accepted toward degree programs and financial benefits lagging institutional due dates (Glasser, Powers and Zywiak, 2009). Still others may feel that their military experiences distance themselves

from their classmates (Washington et al., 2010; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Like other minority student groups, women student veterans may lack same-gender role models both in the military and on campus. Women student veterans transitioning to campus may have a disability not typically seen on the college campus, including posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries (TBI), military sexual traumas (MST), and depression, all of which impacts concentration and memory (Ackerman et al., 2009; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Ford et al., 2009; Mattocks et al., 2012; Moon & Schma, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

Colleges must prepare themselves to support the influx of women student veterans on their campuses; and in turn women student veterans who embark on the path from being service member to a student must adjust to their changing roles. Women student veterans, unlike their civilian counterparts, are less likely to seek help (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Vacchi, 2012). Women veterans, as they transition to becoming students, are exhibiting similar behaviors of not seeking help. In the college setting, this means not participating in programs and services geared to the veteran population on campus (Sander, 2012b). Women student veterans tend to blend in easily with the general population of students on campus and may not identify with being a veteran. This lack of visibility can limit women student veterans' access to helpful sources of support (Sander, 2012b). The programs and policies at colleges can be developed to address women student veterans, which can help them adapt to the new environment of college life.

Adapting to the college setting is necessary for any student to succeed. A critical variable in achieving success in college is knowing when to ask for help (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Karabenick, 2001). This is particularly true for women student veterans who are required to have a high degree of self-advocacy to deal successfully with several new demands (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The male-dominated environment of the military and the image of rugged individualism could discourage help-seeking behavior for women veterans (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Herbert, 1998). This adaptive behavior may continue as women student veterans' transition to the college campus environment, making it challenging to encourage them to seek help from both academic and student services. "The ability to use help-seeking as a coping strategy is a critical component for success in the academic and social integration process" (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011, p. 78). Behaviors learned during their military enlistment may limit women student veterans from seeking help, and in turn may hinder their success. Thus, there is a need to identify the various ways they seek help (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Students with military experience have unique needs which differ from traditional students. Historically, veteran students have shown differences in personal values, visions, goals, motivations, emotional needs, responsibilities, and needs for independence (Donahue & Tibbitts, 1946). A recently uncovered problem is that women student veterans exhibit lower help-seeking behaviors and increased self-doubt, more so than



their male colleagues and students with no military experience (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). “The most difficult task for any veteran may be learning that it is all right to need help and even more important to seek help when needed” (Vacchi, 2012, p. 18). Seeking help may be especially difficult for women student veterans who have learned from the military complex behaviors in relation to seeking help. Herbert (1998) recognized women in the military are unwilling to allow others, especially men, to help them, even where help is warranted, for fear of appearing weak. This behavior can continue as women transition to college and do not seek help for academic or social support services. Very few women take part in programs and services designed to support student veterans, which is at odds with the number enrolled (Sander, 2012b). Women student veterans’ reluctance to take part in activities offered for veterans on campus presents institutions with the dilemma on how best to support them (Sander, 2012b). If a student does not come forward, then how can a college campus help them? When referring to women student veterans, Sander (2012b) contends “they are clearly not seeking help” (p.1). It is critical for higher education professionals to understand the masking behavior of women student veterans, many of whom mask their own needs even if they are simple to address (Vacchi, 2012).

A dilemma for higher education institutions is that little research exists about women student veterans and their help-seeking behaviors. Campbell and Raja (2005) studied the help-seeking experiences of female veterans with military and civilian social systems, yet their focus was on sexual assault survivors and not college students. Mattocks and others (2012) studied women veterans to identify their stressful military

experiences, challenges with reintegration post-deployment, and coping strategies in managing stress. The study, though, lacked information about coping strategies to manage stress while reintegrating to college. That research only examined reintegration with families, jobs, and communities (Mattocks et al., 2012). Glover-Graf, Miller, and Freeman (2010) in their qualitative study looked at accommodations for veterans with PTSD in the academe. The study, though, did not specifically address women student veterans with PTSD nor other self-help seeking behaviors for the student veterans not diagnosed with PTSD.

Komiya, Good, and Sherrod (2000) examined the effect of emotional openness and other potential predictors of attitudes toward seeking psychological help. The sample of three hundred college students uncovered differences with male and female attitudes toward seeking help. Their research results showed a 25% variance in attitudes toward seeking psychological help with male perceptions of stigma and discomfort, with emotions as being the main distress factors. These gender differences between men and women with regards to seeking psychological help are informative yet this study (Komiya et al., 2000) was not inclusive of students who had military experience and, if any participants were student veterans, they were not identified as such.

Glasser et al. (2009) researched the barriers and challenges student veterans may experience while attending college. Utilizing focus groups, several issues emerged including enrollment problems and negative experiences within the classroom (Glasser et al., 2009). Although the study done by Glasser and others (2009) is helpful in uncovering the frustrations some student veterans experience as students, it lacks information specific

to women student veterans and their own help-seeking behaviors. As provided here, the research surrounding the topic of women student veterans and their help-seeking behaviors is incomplete. This study can add to the research about women student veterans and their help-seeking behaviors where little investigation currently exists.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. In addition, the events that caused them to seek help and the resources they utilized are described. There exists a lack of higher education research, training, and services specifically tailored to the needs of women student veterans. Women student veterans have unique military experience which is part of their identity. This study was developed to investigate how both undergraduate and graduate women student veterans seek help for themselves once they have transitioned from a military culture to a collegiate one. The study also examined events that caused women student veterans to seek help and how they perceive resources when seeking help. These resources can include family, friends, college staff and faculty, as well as VA services. Help-seeking behavior for this study is considered a problem-solving skill for overall success in college. Understanding women student veteran related needs and experiences may help women student veterans succeed in higher education.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The three questions addressed in this study are:

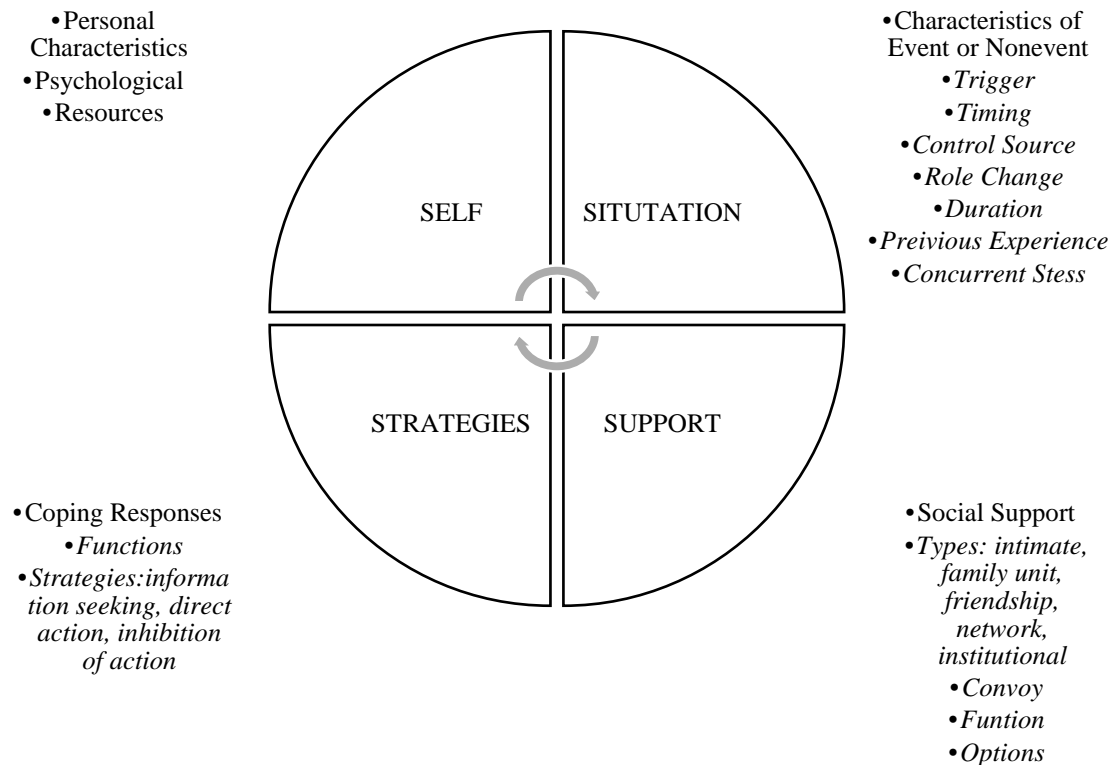
1. Does the prior military experience of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help?
2. What are the events that cause women student veterans to seek help?
3. What are the resources that women student veterans utilize?

### **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework provides the researcher the lens to view the world (Merriam, 2009). Rather than propose a new theory or concept, an existing theoretical framework based on a previous study's conceptual analysis which existed in the literature guided this research and approach. The theoretical perspective by which this inquiry was drawn is Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory (1981, 1984). This theory is based on the individual and what they consider to be a transition in their life. As women student veterans transition from the military to college, there are events and nonevents which take place and change their help-seeking relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. Schlossberg (1984) suggests individuals make meaning of these transitions based on type, context, and impact of the transition. The transition process has three roughly defined stages: Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out (Schlossberg, 1984; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). During this transition process, reactions to events and experiences happen over time. Schlossberg (1981, 1984) identifies four coping factors that individuals experience as they go through a transitional event. These four factors are

referred to in the literature as the 4 s's and are: (1) Situation, (2) Self, (3) Support, and (4) Strategy (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984; Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995). Situation involves the triggers, timing, control, role, change, duration, previous experience, concurrent stress, and assessment of the experience. Self involves the personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources of the individual. Support involves the types, functions, and measurement of the transition event. Finally, Strategy encompasses the strategies and coping responses.

Figure 1 provides an illustration of the Adult Transition Theory's coping resources or the 4 S model (Schlossberg, 1984; Goodman, et al., 2006).



*Figure 1: Coping Resources the Four S's (Derived from Goodman, Schlossberg and Anderson (2006). Counseling Adults in Transition.*

Individual student identity development, as it relates to transitional obstacles, is not a new topic to the study of student development in higher education. The phenomenon of help-seeking behavior of women student veterans as they transition to college is a topic not yet covered in the literature and therefore will add to the student development collection. Table 1 displays the relationships between the theoretical framework, research questions, and interview questions (Appendix C).

*Table 1: Relationships between Theoretical Framework, Research Questions and Interview Questions*

Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1984)	Research Questions	Interview Questions:
Self	1. Does the prior military experience of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help?	1, 2, 4, 5
Situation	2. What are the events that cause women student veterans to seek help?	3, 6, 8, 9
Support	3. What are the resources that women student veterans utilize when seeking help?	7, 10, 11, 12, 13
Strategies	Help-seeking behavior as coping response	

## 1.5 Significance of the Study

The future of higher education includes growth of women students coming to college with military experiences. Yet, before program development, implementation, and assessment can occur, a conversation with women student veterans needs to happen. Female students who come to college with a military background bring to campus a voice

uniquely their own. Finding their identity may be a difficult task, once they are no longer easily differentiated as soldiers by their uniforms (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009).

Women student veterans have experienced cultures of both the military and college yet we know little about them or the factors that lead them to seek help.

Help-seeking behavior is an important skill where women student veterans are able "... to utilize adults and peers as resources to cope with difficulties encountered in learning situations" (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985, p. 55). The literature which does exist surrounding women student veterans and their help-seeking behavior has provided evidence that there exists a gap of connecting women student veterans with campus resources to assist them. "Discerning what services are needed is a nearly impossible task when women student veterans do not use existing resources" (Sander, 2012b, p. A14). As more women join the military as a stepping stone to get a college degree, student and academic affairs leaders can learn more about the military, war and combat, and service members' experiences, which could complement a campus's broader commitment to diversity and social understanding (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). A final possible outcome from this study can be informing colleges and universities who seek to develop programs for veterans that engage more women.

## **1.6 Definitions of Terms**

**Student Veteran** – The term student veteran is defined as an undergraduate student who is a current or former member of the active duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves

regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use (Vacchi, 2012).

Help-Seeking Behavior – This is considered an adaptive strategy that people can use when they encounter problems too difficult for them to solve by themselves (Roussel, Elliot, & Feltman, 2011)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that may develop following an event that caused or threatened serious harm or death (Glover-Graf, et al., 2010).

Military Sexual Trauma (MST) – Experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault that occur in military settings; these experiences of sexual victimization are had by both men and women (Street & Stafford, 2004).

## **1.7 Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. In addition, the events that caused them to seek help and the resources they utilized are described. The personal interpretations of the experiences of women students who served in the military and are now on campus is presented in this qualitative study. The positionality is one of advocacy. This research interest is focused on seeing women veterans attain a college degree that coincides with their personal goals. Chapter two identifies factors which may affect women student veterans' experiences with seeking help to include combat exposure experiences of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Chapter three



details the phenomenological approach to this qualitative inquiry which uses in-depth interviews to provide a thick description of the participants who seek help, for what reasons, and from whom. This study approached the problem by examining the individual's common or shared experiences of the phenomenon 'seeking help', by looking at the self, situation, and social support variables of the theoretical framework (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984) and identifying themes. The identification of themes can lead to a deeper understanding of the help-seeking behaviors of women veterans who are college students. Ultimately, the themes which come out of this study can lead to the development of practices or policies which positively serve women student veterans. By better comprehending women student veterans' needs and their help-seeking behavior, we are better able to show support for their service to this country.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review is intended to present the research available regarding women student veterans. The key concepts explored involve the relationship of women students with military experience and the factors which may affect their help-seeking engagement as students. These potential influential factors involve experiences of military combat, post-traumatic stress disorder, and military sexual trauma. The chapter will examine some of the differences of military and college cultures, and the challenging transitions that exist for women student veterans. The concluding portion of this chapter will discuss the potential contributions this study can expect to make and suggestions to further study this phenomenon of women student veterans and help-seeking behavior in college.

Patriotism is one of many reasons why men and women decide to join the military, and another primary motivator is the promise of educational benefits (DiRamio et al., 2008). In present day with the absence of a draft, postsecondary education benefits present an attractive incentive for military enlistment to both men and women (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). The military for many is chosen as a means of seeking a better life for veterans and their families because ultimately they will be able to attend college (Glover-Graf, et al., 2010). Some military personnel also join the armed services to escape poverty, and getting an education is the way out (Glover-Graf et al., 2010; Martone, 2008). The increase in the population of student veterans (760,000 veterans

having utilized the Post-9/11 GI Bill) to enroll in college is an opportunity for colleges to structure dedicated programming and customized services for veterans (Sander, 2012a).

Students with military experience, though, are not a new concept in higher education. Dating from colonial times, college campuses became key sites to develop citizen soldiers for military service (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). “The relationship between higher education and the military was strengthened with the passage of the 1862 Morrill Act which established military training programs at land-grant institutions” (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009, p. 26). It was the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 known by most as the original GI Bill which laid the foundation for support to veterans through education benefits. Olson argues the GI Bill was “created in part to forestall economic and societal problems related to discharging large numbers of World War II soldiers. [The GI Bill] granted educational and other economic benefits to returning veterans. Veterans entered higher education in unprecedented number[s], nearly overwhelming the system and changing the face of postsecondary education” (as cited in Rumann & Hamrick, 2009, p. 26).

Approximately seven million veterans used the original GI Bill for some type of educational benefit yet only about two million of those used the financial aid to go to college; the rest finished their high school diplomas, went to vocational schools, or trained on the job (“History and Timeline,” n.d.). The middle class was formed with the GI Bill, by furthering social mobility through access to higher education (Rumann et al., 2011). Today, the new GI Bill is the Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008 (Title V of the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008, H.R. 2642) and provides

education benefits which pay for tuition, fees, housing, books, and supplies for qualified veterans (“History and Timeline”, n.d.). Steele, Salcedo, and Coley report “in its first year of implementation more than half a million veterans applied for certificates of eligibility for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and more than 300,000 veterans and family members used the benefit to attend classes” (as cited in O’Herrin, 2011, p. 15). The Post-9/11 GI Bill legislation provides evidence that education benefits for veterans to gain access to higher education continues to be on the social agenda and veterans going to college after military service is a likely outcome.

Recent quantitative research from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) captures responses from 844,500 military service members and veterans and their dependents regarding college support services (Queen & Lewis, 2014). This report is important because of its expansive assemblage of college effects on veteran services. Surveying more than fourteen hundred two- and four-year colleges covering public, private, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors, the NCES study found more than two-thirds of the veterans in the study had attended public institutions and of those more than fifty percent of the public institutions reported that veteran students were paying in-state tuition (Queen & Lewis, 2014). Public colleges offer more support services for veterans and military students than private and for-profit institutions (Queen & Lewis, 2014). Women veteran undergraduate students were twenty-seven percent (228,015) of the veteran undergraduate population for the 2012-2013 academic year (Queen & Lewis, 2014). The report done by NCES is the first nationally representative data on services

and support programs for military service members and veterans at postsecondary institutions.

One critique in the literature and of the Department of Veterans Affairs is the lack of data available on the numbers of educational benefit recipients by gender. This would make it easier for the government, the public, and especially the higher education community to project growth or lack of growth with regards to women student veterans (Sander, 2012b). Another critique is the lack of data available from the federal government regarding veteran retention or completion rates. This makes it difficult to explain why student veterans are not exhausting their benefits (O'Herrin, 2011). Without this information, our knowledge and understanding of women student veterans is limited.

In contemporary literature, there are a variety of perceptions on student veteran success commonly dividing into two categories; those studies looking at life outcomes for veterans and other research that describe veteran services on campus. Student veterans that do attend college are intentional (Vacchi, 2012). Many of them do well academically. They have greater performance in the classroom, higher retention rates, and are more successful at transfer rates from community colleges to four-year institutions (Vacchi, 2012). From this perspective, student veterans generally can adapt to and overcome challenges. On the other hand, most veterans pursuing higher education during and after active service, per Ryan and others (2011), do not complete a bachelor's degree. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) show that only a small percentage of veterans use all their federal education benefits (O'Herrin, 2011). Without completion of baccalaureate degrees, student veterans set themselves up for lower educational

attainment and income deficits (Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013). The negative outcomes (educational deficit and long term deficit) may indicate conflict between the norms and values of the military and postsecondary education (Wilson et al., 2013). Student veterans do share frustrations that center on the balance between work and educational commitments (Wilson et al., 2013). These frustrations involve policies and practices of colleges, navigating education benefits, and getting quality advising (Wilson et al., 2013). The research which exists on student veterans tends to focus on men, and the limited number that do include women veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars predominantly focus on the role of women in combat and mental health concerns such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military sexual trauma (MST), and issues with gender identity (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Street & Stafford, 2004).

Research on women student veterans and their help-seeking behaviors could not be found. Therefore, it is the intention of this chapter to provide a review of the research surrounding the key concepts of the military experiences of women. The multiple cultural and personal transition challenges women student veterans may face is also included in this literature review. Finally, the literature review includes a selection of theorized behaviors toward seeking help behavior. Exploring these categories which exist in the literature can assist with understanding the different experiences of the women student veteran. The relationships of the following key concepts and main factors should be considered when seeking student engagement of women student veterans.

### **2.1.1 Perspectives on military culture vs. culture of higher education.**

There are clear differences in culture and socialization experiences between academia and the military (Vacchi, 2012). “The military trains and develops leadership and initiative from the beginning of military service, and duty is marked by high levels of discipline and teamwork” (Vacchi, 2012, p. 18). In contrast, the college environment is less structured; this can be challenging for someone accustomed to the structured daily routine of the military (Rumann & Hammrick, 2009). The military culture is valuing high unit cohesion and solidarity particularly during times of combat (Street & Stafford, 2004). In contrast, the college environment is often viewed as lacking accountability and having no true “chain of command” (Glasser et al., 2009). McBain (2009) stresses the importance of the differences in the “command-and-control structure of the military” and the stakeholder, compared to the shared expertise culture of the academe on the behaviors of veteran students. In the recent American Council on Education Report, *From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members*, there exists “...very different social structures of the military and academe, but also the complicated historical context influencing the two worlds’ interactions and stereotypes of both service members and college students still present in American society...” (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012, p. 24). Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) inform that there are also variances in the context as well as societal expectations between the military and higher education which are distinctly different.

A common thread for this population is their experience with military socialization (Vacchi, 2012). In the military, de-personalization and de-individuation are

emphasized immediately when a person enters basic training (Herbert, 1998; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Baechtold & De Sawal (2009) also report the mental and physical demands encountered in basic training are significantly different than those placed on first-year students in college.

“...the military trains service members to behave as parts of an organization that functions best when individual differences are deemphasized. However, institutions of higher education specifically encourage students to celebrate their individuality and discover the qualities that distinguish them from their peers” (Ryan et al., 2011, p. 57).

A woman student veteran may experience culture shock and can be forced to modify behaviors such as using profane language (Ryan et al., 2011). Wilson et al. (2013) add that the norms of college will be noticeably different from the norms of the military. The divergent cultural norms of the military and college become more apparent as the woman student veteran transitions.

### **2.1.2 Transitions.**

All college students experience transitions upon entering the academe. Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory (1981, 1984) is a theory of college student development that frames this study. The theory is a vehicle for “analyzing human adaptation” (Schlossberg, 1981, p.2). Schlossberg (1984) states the response to a new environment is affected by three sets of variables: the perception of the transition, the environment prior to and after the transition, and the personal characteristics of the individual. Schlossberg (1984) describes four coping resources or 4 S's: situation, self,



support, and strategies. These variables aid in characterizing the transition, the individual, and the environment.

Transitions do exist for women student veterans and it is important to mention that not all experiences are negative nor do all women student veterans have these same experiences. Though the change in environment from one that is strict, disciplined, and extremely demanding to a less structured, less team-based one can add to the stress for women student veterans (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Vacchi, 2012). Leaving the practices of the military-structured world to a collegiate one, women student veterans are not only balancing redefining themselves as civilians but also as students (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Herbert, 1998; Vacchi, 2012). “The organizational culture of the military and the university are very different, and it takes [women] veterans time to adjust” (Glasser et al., 2009, p. 33). This adjustment is difficult when there appears to be little understanding or appreciation for the level of responsibility, training, discipline, and competence of US military personnel (Vacchi, 2012). Themes within the literature (Ackerman et al., 2009; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Vacchi, 2012) suggest that the foundational frustrations of women student veterans are their ability to navigate the bureaucracy of a college campus and not seeking support on the campus.

Glasser et al., (2009) in their qualitative study highlight several barriers and challenges that student veterans experience in college. Enrollment issues and negative experiences within the classroom have been identified as the two main challenges student veterans face (Glasser et al., 2009). The enrollment issues primarily surrounded difficulty with VA benefits and lack of knowledge by colleges which they experienced as lack of

support (Glasser et al., 2009). Student veterans shared experiences about being highly uncomfortable with questions about killing and faculty political views about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan being fact rather than opinion and on occasion not within the context of the lecture (Glasser et al., 2009). The transition to college was challenging for the student veterans in the study and suggestions to make the transition smoother was emphasized.

Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) sought to investigate the issues combat veterans experience as they transition to college. In their qualitative study using interviews (N=19 men; N=6 women) to gather insight into these issues, the authors found dealing with VA bureaucracy, lack of campus programming for veterans, and fitting in to be the top transition issues (Ackerman et al., 2009). Ackerman et al. (2009) used the Schlossberg et al. (1995) framework which focuses on life altering transitions to find key emergent themes relating to joining the military, differing deployment experiences, serving in a war zone, and moving from combat into the classroom. Ackerman and others (2009) also recognized PTSD, combat-related physical injuries, alcohol and drug abuse and anger as other issues student veterans may encounter. Their research highlights the need for student veterans to be more proactive when they get to college and to develop new coping strategies inclusive of developing a support peer network (Ackerman et al., 2009). The authors emphasized the importance of women student veterans as a distinct population to further research.

Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, and Harris (2011) introduced academic advisors to the strengths, needs and challenges associated with student-veterans. The purpose of the

study was to inform advisors on how to connect student-veterans to potential supports and services on campus. Ryan et al. (2011) recommended using the “4Ss” of Schlossberg’s Transition Model (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995) to influence the quality of transitions. The four factors of situation, self, support, and strategies are examined for strengths and weaknesses and whether they facilitate or hinder a successful transition. Ryan et al. (2011) also suggested that the values and coping skills effective in the military may not transfer to being equally effective in the higher education culture. Different expectations in the new collegiate environment can also influence women student veterans’ sense of hopefulness and control (Ryan et al., 2011). Some student veterans may enjoy the change to a college culture appreciating the separation from the restrictions of the military and others may find the role change more difficult, particularly if they highly respected the military environment (Ryan et al., 2011).

“A given role change can be difficult (and have greater or lesser impact) depending on whether the new role is a loss or a gain, positive or negative, or has explicit norms and expectations for the new incumbent” (Ryan et al., 2011, p. 56).

The study proposed by Wilson, Smith, Lee, and Stevenson (2013) emphasize the academic and social integration of student veterans in higher education using Tinto’s (1972) model. In their qualitative study of thirteen student veterans (N=5 women), Wilson and colleagues (2013) explored how military personnel describe their college commitments and experiences with college work. The study using Tinto’s model of student integration, where students develop a commitment to the institution through academic and social integration experiences and are more likely to persist, resulted in conflicts between the norms and values of the military and postsecondary education. A

key concept to their framework was that “individuals must accept the norms and values of a group and affiliate with other members of the group to persist as a member of the group” (Wilson et al., 2013, p. 630). Their findings, however, show that academic integration was not connected to college goal so much as it was connected to military, employment, family goals, and commitments. The results also showed that the soldiers were not socially integrated with their college campuses. The student veterans appeared to have little or no interest in the traditional aspects of college, like athletics, social groups, or campus activities (Wilson et al., 2013). A unique aspect of the study was the insight into the motivations for attending college. Responses about why student veterans were seeking a degree ranged from military promotion to using college as a stepping stone in transitioning from the military to civilian life (Wilson et al., 2013). A concluding finding from the study was the response from eight of the participants who indicated that the desire to attend college came only after joining the military, suggesting that their military service incentivized a desire to attend college (Wilson et al., 2013).

Military life for many women veterans is one in which there is a constant pressure to prove oneself and they often feel they do not belong (Sander, 2012a). Women who are indoctrinated to the military culture and are exposed to combat tend to experience situations of not always being welcomed by their soldiers. This is relevant to understanding if these actions or strategies continue to be used when in college or if there are changes. Women student veterans like other veterans choose to attend college for a variety of reasons. The transition to the college setting thus can be seen as negative or positive when the “...gender dynamics of the military can fade...” (Sander, 2012b, p. 3).

Ultimately, the military experiences, whether good or bad, shape the individual student's perception of the collegiate one.

## **2.2 Women Student Veteran Experiences**

### **2.2.1 The military impact.**

Since 1901 women have officially served in the U.S. military with the creation of the Army Nurse Corp and unofficially since the Revolutionary War (Holm, 1992; Wing et al, 2000; Sander, 2012a). Women gained formal status as veterans in "...1948 when Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act granting women permanent status in the military subject to military authority and regulations and entitled to veterans' benefits" (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2008). It was in the late 1970's when the draft ended (males only) and an all-volunteer military was formed that opportunities for women in the military grew (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2008; Sander, 2012b). Today "women ... join the military for a host of reasons: a duty to country, adventure, a career, gaining technical skills or a college degree, and providing for their families" (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011, p. 69). Research has also shown that several women who enlist are escaping abusive and violent home environments (Foster & Vince, 2009). Regardless of the reason for joining the military, women are increasing their presence. There are over 160,000 female soldiers have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, as compared to Vietnam (7,500) and Gulf (41,000) Wars (Corbett, 2007). "Today one of every 10 U.S. soldiers in Iraq is female" (Corbett, 2007, p. 5).

“There are now over 1.8 million women veterans nationwide. Women veterans represent 7.5 percent of the total U.S. veteran population of 23.4 million. The Veterans Administration projects that the proportion of women veterans will continue to grow to 10 percent in 2020 and to almost 14 percent by 2030 and the proportion of male veterans will continue to decline” (Foster & Vince, 2009, p. 18).

Women student veterans are exposed to unique experiences when they enlist in the U.S. military. Earlier studies on women in the military provide both general and specific experiences, i.e. attendance at West Point, being lesbian in the military, and serving in Vietnam (Herbert, 1998). Prior research has regarded the military as a domain that is highly traditional, primarily conservative and values notions of maleness and masculinity (Herbert, 1998). Herbert (1998) suggests that the military both institutionally and interpersonally marginalizes women in all military settings. Some examples of these are restrictions on women in nontraditional occupations and combat as well as through sexual harassment practices and discrimination (Herbert 1998). Herbert’s (1998) mixed methods analysis examined how gender and sexuality interact to shape how women manage life in the military. Herbert (1998) investigated how women veterans adjusted to the demands of the situation of joining the military. The purpose of the study was to better understand the kinds of actions or strategies women in the military employ to be accepted as women soldiers (Herbert, 1998). Each action by the female veteran was observed as appropriate or not for each setting. This research perspective can be further investigated when the setting is switched to the college campus.

In the military, feminine characteristics are discouraged. The military affirms masculinity, serves as the vehicle for “men to become soldiers,” and represents the traditional male sex-role identity (Herbert, 1998). “It is not enough to simply be male; he

must be “more male” than the men in the next squad, platoon, and so forth” (Herbert, 1998, p. 8). “The military is an “institutionalized arena” in which the masculine is preferred over the feminine, and men are preferred over women” (Herbert, 1998, p. 21). In this environment, women veterans must constantly challenge their sex-defined stereotypes of being too weak for military duty and war zones (Corbett, 2007). Women in the military are often placed in three categories as a bitch, a whore, or a dyke (Corbett, 2007; Herbert, 1998). Gender disparities also exist between men and women in the military. “Matthew Freidman, executive director for the National Center for PTSD reports that rape may be the likely cause in the gender disparity with PTSD, participation in combat would be the second leading cause” (Corbett, 2007, p. 5). It must be noted that not all women report negative experiences in the military. Some women in Corbett’s article (2009) reported feeling at ease among the men in their platoons and were treated respectfully by their peers. For many, sexual remarks by others was not tolerated.

Having been in the minority while in the military, women student veterans adapt to the gender dynamics of the primarily masculine military (Sander, 2012b). Women must learn how to redefine their “femaleness” (Herbert, 1998). Women veterans may display more resiliency and show less emotion than they otherwise might so as not to show weakness (Corbett, 2009). Baechtold & De Sawal (2009) state some women go to extremes and “...feel pressures to act either more feminine, more masculine, or both and some suppress their femininity or engage in more typically male behaviors such as swearing or drinking alcohol” (p. 40). Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) offer that strategies are employed by women veterans that move the individual away from natural

expression of gender to a more forced and conscious one. Another strategy used by women veterans during war is not to bond with other women. In Corbett's 2009 article, most women "reported that they avoided friendships with other women during deployment, in part because of the fact there were fewer women to choose from and in part because of the ridicule that came with having a close friend" (p. 7). This behavior appears to continue when women veterans reenter civilian life. They are especially frustrated with civilian women complaints. "The day to day dramas and crises that plague the typical civilian woman may appear ridiculous and absurd when compared with the dangers of combat" (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, p. 37). The research surrounding women student veterans must include the concept that the military forces women to balance femininity and masculinity (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Herbert, 1998).

Interest in the role of women in the military has increased dramatically, largely due to the influx of women in the military and because of their increasing exposure to combat (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Herbert, 1998). The lines between combat and noncombat missions have become blurred in the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (Baker, 2006; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Research suggests women exposed to combat and the dangers of war are subject to the same stresses as men (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Actual or perceived danger are primary sources of stress faced by women veterans (Kang, 2006; Mattocks, Haskell, Krebs, Justice, & Yano, 2012). The combat experiences of women who have been deployed can be difficult because of their gender and the male-dominated traditions of the military (Ackerman et al., 2009; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Herbert, 1998). When in combat, women must learn to navigate the



complex social and work assignments where there is a lack of other women colleagues to turn to for support (Ackerman et al., 2009). In her qualitative study of combat experiences of female veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, Strong (2013) provides three emerging themes of combat experiences. The three themes include combat or post-battle events, witnessing combat or post-battle events, and feeling threatened (Strong, 2013). Using a gender identity framework, Strong (2013) postulates that women may make meaning from their experiences based on gender, and this can influence the individual's response to an event (Strong, 2013). Strong recommends "...with the integration of women into combat roles over the next few years, the effects of gender roles on military experiences such as combat should be explored further" (p. 11-12).

The effects of combat experiences of women veterans do go beyond the psychological "...such as in relationships, caring for children, or when dealing with issues such as homelessness or domestic violence" (Strong, 2013, p. 6). With over 40% of active duty women having children (Department of Defense, 2006) and more than 300,000 single mothers having been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan (Department of Defense, 2010) disruption of relationships with children and family is an important influential factor to their college success. In examining women's experiences in war, and how they cope with these experiences, Mattocks, Haskell, Krebs, Justice and Yano (2012) in their qualitative study of OEF/OIF women veterans (N=19) offer insight into the reintegration process of women with their families, jobs, and communities. Mattocks and others (2012) use "Moos and Schafer's model of coping resources and processes (1993) [which] suggest that coping resources, include[e] personal and social factors that

influence how individual[s] manage life crises and transitions as well as coping processes” (p. 538). The study (Mattocks et al., 2012) recognized two categories of stressful military combat experiences; mission related stressors and interpersonal stressors. The mission related stressors include difficult living and working environments. The interpersonal stressors included military sexual trauma and other sexual harassment experiences. Other interpersonal stressors for women in combat included having concerns about family disruption and separation from the family (Mattocks et al., 2012). Family-related stressors are a key consideration in women student veterans’ self-help behavior during their college experiences. Family stressors differ for men and women, as “...women veterans who are returning to the United States after months of deployment may feel that, despite their own personal medical or mental needs, the focus needs shift away from their own personal needs to the needs of their children and other family members” (Mattocks et al., 2012, p. 544). A woman’s typical responsibilities of home, childcare, cooking meals, housekeeping, and other tasks must still be maintained by the women student veteran or given to spouses, family members, or friends which causes stress (Mattocks et al., 2012). Women in the study reported they had not received any help with the family readjustment process. The women expressed concerns regarding having to renegotiate relationships with their children (Mattocks et., 2012).

There are cognitive and behavioral coping resources women student veterans use to manage their stress. Isolation and lack of social support are types of avoidance coping strategies used by women veterans with combat experience (Mattocks et al., 2012). Instead of trying to share their experiences, many women veterans choose instead to

remove themselves from others. The alternative coping strategy is when some women reach out to others to help them through difficult post-deployment experiences. In the study done by Mattocks and others (2012), many of the participants responded that getting together with other women was important to share their experiences with deployment and support. The literature on combat experience stressors and coping behaviors is thin, yet what is evident is that women student veterans' stressors are unique to this population.

Higher education personnel who have limited knowledge about women student veterans are presented with a challenge and may find it especially difficult to understand the experiences of this population of students (Glover-Graf et al., 2010). Women student veterans who have had combat exposure are likely to have been exposed to trauma from that experience. It is important to recognize that mental health issues such as PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and MST can be the effects of combat experiences for women veterans (Street & Stafford, 2004). Further research is needed to better understand the coping strategies of women student veterans with mental health issues, rehabilitating combat-related injuries, and alcohol and drug abuse needs (Street & Safford, 2004).

### **2.2.2 Post-traumatic stress disorder.**

A look at women student veterans' experiences often leads to discussions about the mental health concerns of those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that may develop following an

event that caused or threatened serious harm or death (Glover-Graf et al., 2010).

Military-related PTSD is often a chronic condition that increases suicide risk, chronic health problems, and unemployment (Glover-Graf et al., 2010). The American Psychiatric Association (2000) has found that the average time to recover from PTSD is seven years (Glover-Graf et al., 2010). A survey done by the RAND center for Military Health Policy Research (2008) revealed that 19% of U.S. returned service members from Afghanistan and Iraq currently suffer from PTSD or depression (Glover-Graf et al., 2010), and "...the VA office has diagnosed possible PTSD in some 34,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans; nearly 3800 of them are women." (Corbett, 2009). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is documented to be common among women veterans (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Johnson, Nelson, & Bradley, 2006). "The estimated risks of suffering from PTSD [for women] is approximately 18 percent after service in Iraq and 11 percent after service in Afghanistan (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, p. 36). There is evidence of higher rates of PTSD in women who served in combat in comparison to men (Corbett, 2007; Herbert, 1998; Sander, 2012b). Yet reports indicate that women are not as likely to be diagnosed with PTSD as men are (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). This may be based on cultural views which do not easily recognize women as combatants, as well as a tendency to diagnose women's mental health problems as depression or anxiety rather than combat-related PTSD (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; U.S. Department of Defense, 2007). This information presents a conflict in findings about women and PTSD whereby women veterans are more likely than their male counterparts to suffer from PTSD, yet they are less likely to be diagnosed.

Women student veterans who have been in a war-zone often experience prolonged periods of stress. This stress leads to distinctive psychological concerns when given the diagnosis of PTSD (Wolfe, Schnurr, Brown, and Furey, 1994). There are several symptoms of PTSD women veterans experience such as: hyper reactivity, hyper arousal, depression, and anxiety (Wolfe et al., 1994). Other factors that may affect academic success for women student veterans are problems with cognitive skills, judgment, concentration, and memory (Church, 2009). There are attempts by the VA to address the psychological specific mental health needs of women. An investigation on the psychological services provided to women veterans done by Schuler, Barclay, Harrison and Larson (1986) were classified in four classifications: a) individual women served in response to requests, b) individual programs designed to meet specific needs, c) educational programs offered to female clients, and d) staff training programs (Schuler et al., 1986). Two key findings from the study were provided. The first conclusion was that the psychological needs of women veterans who are older is an important aspect of mental health. Second, having VA women staff psychologists on site could increase the usage of VA facilities by women veterans (Schuler et al., 1986). Women veterans are less likely to seek services from the Veterans Administration (VA) and are rated by VA staff as possessing sub-assertive behaviors (Corbett, 2007; Schuler et al., 1986). The behavior of not seeking help can continue to occur with women veterans when they become students.

PTSD has not only psychological effects on women student veterans but physical effects as well. Earlier research on women veterans of the Vietnam War show that there

are unique associations of war-zone exposure and PTSD ((Wolfe et al., 1994). In one study of 109 female veterans of the Vietnam War, associations of war-zone exposure and PTSD were found to affect physical health outcomes (Wolfe et al., 1994). Utilizing a four-dimensional model, Wolfe and others (1994) found that the effects of traumatic exposure did increase PTSD, affecting a decrease in healthy lifestyles after exposure. It has been identified that avoidance, a symptom of PTSD, can also lead to sedentary activities (Johnson et al., 2006). Women veterans with PTSD report more physical health problems, poorer health status, more obesity, and more medical service utilization than veterans without PTSD (Wolfe et al., 1994; Johnson et al., 2006).

Another constraint is that treatment for PTSD at university and college counseling centers is limited (Glover-Graf et al., 2010). In a qualitative analysis of veterans, to address the self-identified adjustment concerns for combat veterans in relation to their potential impact on classroom learning, Glover-Graf and others (2010) acknowledged that treatment for student veterans with PTSD should be resourced out due to lack of qualified staff who are experienced with PTSD. Their study, however, lacks information on PTSD and women veterans; the sample consisted of 7 male Hispanic veterans of the Iraq War. Although no women were included, a strength of the study was its relevance to post-service classroom adjustment (Glover et al., 2010). Using grounded theory as a framework the participant responses established four themes: professional concerns, social interactions, behavioral and emotional challenges, and changing life view. Because women student veterans must interact socially with either faculty or other students during college, the social interaction theme was of concern. The responses

indicated problems with civilian authority including seeing “civilians” as unworthy of authoritative roles due to lack of training or being unethical (Glover-Graf et al., 2010).

While attending college, veteran isolation from civilians persists. Interestingly, the veteran perspective for many is one of elitism. According to Glover-Graf et al. (2010),

“...Veterans believed they were different than other students in terms of their life concerns. They believed their military experience had made them “better” people in that they viewed themselves as more motivated and dedicated and they viewed other students as frequently immature and concerned with trivial matters” (p. 52).

Finding other students concerns to be “trivial” and unimportant should be a cause for concern for student personnel and faculty, yet this information is restricted to the viewpoints of only male veterans. Questioning women student veterans’ perspectives on authority and how they see other students is necessary to fully encompass both men and women student veteran viewpoints. The participants in the study did express appreciation for clearly established rules, expectations, and schedules (Glover-Graf et al., 2010). This appears to match the discipline and structure of military life.

In the field of public health nursing, one longitudinal study (2.5 year) sought to address the problems of PTSD and MST at the Tulsa VA Outpatient Clinic (Wing, Oertle, Cabioc, Evans, Smith, & Stangeby, 2000). The mechanism that Wing and others (2000) used for the research consisted of a community-based student project for nursing students at the University of Tulsa. The results of the nursing student project were initiation of a support group of six women veterans diagnosed with PTSD and the development of resource manuals for both professional staff and women veterans (Wing et al., 2000). The study was based on the grounded theory centering around the five distinct stages of reacting to triggers, seeking validation, sorting through confusion,

becoming intentional, and affirming self (Wing et al., 2000). All stages are important with regards to women veteran students. Of interest is "...stage four, 'becoming intentional' where victims learn to act toward coping with their traumatic experiences" (Wing et al., 2000, p. 243). Seeking help is action-oriented and if stage four has not been recognized by the women student veteran who has PTSD they may have difficulty setting goals and implementing those goals in the college setting. Outcomes of the support group were suggestions by the participants for resources to agencies that were accessible and offered a variety of services. The design of the resource manual was seen by the authors (Wing et al., 2000) as enhancing the women's coping abilities by introducing them and the staff to resources. It is important to note that the underlying expectation from the study participants was that the staff and other resources could be trusted. Trust is a substantial factor for women student veterans as the psychological traumas such as PTSD and MST of wartime experiences for women can interfere with their quality of life and their success in college.

With more than two million U.S. veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq and preparing to enroll in postsecondary education (American Council on Education, 2008), basic knowledge about PTSD is one of the "...more important barriers to examine regarding enrollment and retention" for women student veterans (Glover-Graf et al., 2010, p. 44). Unique issues for women associated with the military and combat include post-traumatic stress disorder and military sexual trauma (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). In their 2006 report for the US Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Street and Stafford (2004) report that sexual assault



victimization is associated with high lifetime rates of PTSD in both men (65%) and women (45.9%). Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) suggest that student affairs personnel need to be aware of returning veterans' needs for a safe space to process war-related experiences. While adjustment and re-entry issues for women student veterans might be like males, gender differences from military experiences such as Military Sexual Trauma differentiate men and women.

### **2.2.3 Military sexual trauma.**

Military sexual trauma (MST) is both the sexual harassment and sexual assault that occurs to both men and women in military settings (Street & Stafford, 2004). The perpetrator can be of the same or of the opposite gender and while sexual harassment is unwelcome verbal or physical contact with sexual connotations, sexual assault is the activity between at least two people where one is involved against his or her will (Street & Stafford, 2004). Approximately 15.1% of women and 0.7% of men reported military sexual trauma when screened (Kimberling et al., 2010; Mattocks et al., 2012). Although both men and women experience the traumas of military sexual assault, it is still closely tied to gender. Military sexual trauma follows the criteria for gender-based violence under the UN Declaration of Violence Against Women (Mattocks et al., 2012). Sandler (2012b) shows that the Department of Veterans Affairs reports one in five women veterans experienced sexual trauma while in the military.

The occurrences of MST on women veterans gained political attention through Senate VA Committee hearings which sought to address the issues of MST. The outcome

is Public Law 102-585 which was signed into law in 1992 (Street & Stafford, 2004; Wing et al., 2000). This law authorized health care and counseling to women veterans and later reiterations of the law mandated each VA facility to screen for and treat MST through referral processes (Street & Stafford, 2004). The following account demonstrates the prevalence of MST in the military:

“A 2003 report financed by the Department of Defense revealed that nearly one-third of a nationwide sample of female veterans seeking health care through the VA said they experienced rape or attempted rape during their service. Of that group, 37 percent said they were raped multiple times, and 14 percent reported they were gang-raped” (Corbett, 2007, p. 6).

A response came in 2005 with the establishment of a formal Sexual Assault and Prevention and Response Program housed under the Department of Defense (Corbett, 2007). Corbett (2007) in her article for the *New York Times Magazine* adds that the VA response allows for women veteran victims of MST to confidentially report sexual assaults in “restricted reports,” giving them access to medical treatment and counseling without having an official investigation. Yet even with these policy changes for VA services, “...women veterans who may have experienced some form of military sexual trauma may be unwilling to utilize VA services, for fear of encountering the same types of individuals who may have perpetrated the sexual trauma” (Mattocks et al., 2012, p. 544).

Some women that experience military sexual trauma can be working closely with her perpetrator which affects several workplace dynamics. Military service associated with sexual trauma is an experience where the victim lives and works closely with the perpetrator, “...leading to an increased sense of feeling helpless, powerless, and at risk for additional victimization” (Street & Stafford, 2004, p.1). The MST experience can

disrupt career goals of the victims particularly if the perpetrator is a supervisor who can provide poor evaluations or deny promotions (Street & Stafford, 2004). The organizational structure of the military is such that negative information about a fellow soldier is taboo in an environment where high levels of cohesion and solidarity exist (Street & Stafford, 2004). Because of the military culture structure, many victims are reluctant to report their experiences. Reasons for this reluctance include not being believed of the MST experience when the sexual crime was reported, being encouraged to keep silent, having their reports ignored, and being blamed for the experience (Street & Stafford, 2004). There is a sense that reporting an MST experience for many women veterans was pointless. Street and Stafford (2004) offer that by invalidating their MST experience this may likely impact the victim's post-trauma adjustment.

Each woman veteran who experiences MST will have her own varied experience. Women veterans who have suffered from a MST experience will also have a variety of psychological and physical responses based on many factors; these factors include the intensity of the experience, the emotional reactions of the victims, previous trauma history, and quality of support systems following the trauma (Street & Stafford, 2004). The following account reveals the complex nature of MST for women who are forced to have this experience. "Being sexually assaulted by a fellow soldier may prove extra-traumatic, as it represents a breach in the hallowed code of military cohesion--a concept that most enlistees have drilled into them from the first day of boot camp" (Corbett, 2009, p. 9).

In looking at the impact of military and civilian sexual assault on psychiatric, health-related, and general quality-of-life functioning, Suris, Kashner, and Borman (2007) found that women veterans who experienced MST were significantly less satisfied with family relations, health, and daily activities than civilians. Another interesting finding of their quantitative study was that women veterans who had a positive history for MST were significantly younger than those women veterans without MST histories (Suris et al., 2007). Suris et al. (2007) suggests that “[f]uture research should focus on identifying factors that may help explain the differential impact of type of trauma on symptomology” (p. 194).

Other effects of sexual harassment or assault on military women (MST) are feelings of loneliness and anxiety (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Skinner et al., 2000). Feeling lonely or left out appears to be a common adjustment issue for student veterans as a group. The cause for this isolation is wound in the point that women veterans do not see their family and peers understanding their military and combat experiences (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Lack of or low levels of support systems may be detrimental to addressing the anxiety of an MST experience. Not addressing trauma may have astounding affects for many women veterans. In one study done by Hankin, Skinner, Sullivan, Miller, Frayne, and Tripp (1999), women who experienced MST had twice the rates of alcohol abuse and three times higher rates of depression.

The psychological responses for women who have MST appear to be damaging. Women with MST appear to have lower satisfaction with health and work, have difficulty finding work, have higher rates of alcohol and drug problems, and have higher lifetime

rates of PTSD and major depressive disorder (MDD) (Street & Stafford, 2004). MST can lead to feelings of anger, shame, and guilt or self-blame. Women veterans can experience sexual dysfunction, problems with interpersonal relationships, difficulty trusting others, and difficulty engaging in social activities (Street & Stafford, 2004). Some women veterans, when they do place their trust in social systems to help them through their experiences, are harmed even further. Negative treatment by system personnel when they seek help is termed secondary victimization (Campbell & Raja 2005). Secondary victimization is the “victim-blaming behaviors and practices engaged in by legal and medical personnel, which exacerbates victims’ trauma” (Campbell & Raja, 2005, p. 97).

Student Affairs Personnel need to understand the importance of awareness of mental health issues that might affect women student veterans (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Experiences with combat, post-traumatic stress disorder, military sexual trauma, and other mental health concerns can influence attempts to enroll and complete college classes. (Sander, 2012a). The effects of combat exposure, PTSD, and MST are variables to consider regarding women student veteran understandings. These variables can lead to a mental state of being which is demoralized, depressed, and isolated (Corbett, 2007). Women student veterans, because of their possible exposures with combat, PTSD, and MST, may experience feelings of forgetfulness, being unfocused, and being alienated from others, at least in their own minds (Corbett, 2007). These emotional states can potentially affect women student veterans’ ability to adjust and seek help in college. Student services personnel should also be aware that women student veterans may abuse alcohol or drugs as coping strategies to deal with combat, PTSD, and MST experiences

(Corbett 2007). Because the negative post-trauma effects of war are recognized as a problem in the treatment of veterans by the VA (Street et al., 2007), colleges must begin to look at what treatments are working to better serve women student veterans. There must be understanding for their perceptions of trauma to be validated and their needs to be expressed and ultimately met. This literature review is not intending to dramatize PTSD, MST, and other disabilities but to offer awareness of a few of the most mentioned challenges women veterans may face in conjunction with being a student. The concepts of combat, PTSD, and MST are appropriate to understanding women student veterans and their perspectives and behaviors for seeking help in college.

#### **2.2.4 Academic and social adjustments.**

Women student veterans not only have to adjust to re-entering civilian life but also as students. It is important to understand the several re-entry challenges specifically those related to adjustments both academically and socially (Glover-Graf et al., 2010; Rumann & Hammrick, 2009; Wilson et al., 2013). Because of their military experience, women student veterans struggle with transitioning from the military to civilian life and may feel isolated and uncertain in the academic setting. Women student veterans may experience issues with self as their roles change after transitioning from the military to college (Ryan et al., 2011).

The dynamic of having gendered military experience is paired against the knowledge that women student veterans are nontraditional (Ackerman et al., 2009; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; O'Herrin, 2011). They are nontraditional in that there is

less intensity and duration a women student veteran has with the primary agents of college socialization (e.g., faculty, peers) (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Often, outside external environmental factors affect engagement and help-seeking behaviors more so than the variables affecting traditional student interactions and attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Sander, 2012a). One factor is if the women student veteran has family responsibilities. “If they are under 35 they are more likely than their civilian peers to have children and be single parents” (Sander, 2012b, p. 1). These outside influences of personal and family obligations weigh heavily on the amount of interactions with campus resources. Even as nontraditional students’ women student veterans have different perspectives of the college experience where some may view college as an obligatory box to be checked to gain employment, while others embrace the opportunity to have the traditional college experience (O’Herrin, 2011).

There are also gender differences which exist with this nontraditional student population. “...Women sometimes experience difficulties adapting to a situation more than men, such as higher education” (Ryan et al., 2011, p. 57). One difference between men and women student veterans is that some women do not identify with their veteran status (Sander, 2012b). Some women student veterans do not want to wear their veteran status openly. Women student veterans may have concerns as to how others might perceive them; this can complicate the transition process and compel them to conceal their veteran identity in some situations, including on campus (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Social isolation increases because many veterans are not willing to engage with

non-veterans (Glover-Graf et al., 2010). Gender differences also exist in how men and women student veterans perceive other students.

In a quantitative study done by Pattillo (2011) women perceived greater levels of disrespect from male student veterans and from nonveterans than male student veterans perceived from the same groups. The study at Auburn University compared the experiences of student veterans and nonveteran students. Several recommendations were made from this study including understanding which campus activities were being used and educating the nonveteran population on campus about student veterans and their barriers (Pattillo, 2011). Pattillo (2011) suggests that women student veterans should find ways to seek services that colleges should offer. In turn, personnel on college campuses who are providing these services must be better informed about the many challenging personal matters of women student veterans. This list of challenges is inclusive of combat experiences, mental health concerns, military to civilian transitions, family and friend reintegration, and more.

When entering the campus environment, women student veterans may feel unwelcome to the new environment. It is encouraged that there be understanding on how barriers may impede successful transitions to higher education (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Two key barriers that women student veterans face to becoming part of the academic community are: (1) faculty insensitivity and (2) negative attitudes of other students (Glover-Graf et al., 2010; Burnett & Segoria, 2009). From the veteran viewpoint, civilians have no sense of how the military operates and civilian students are immature. Rumann and Hamrick (2009) concur when they identify these same two



challenges which led to negative interaction and disconnection from civilian peers.

Rumann and Hamrick (2009) attribute these barriers to the negative feelings of others towards the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a kind of antimilitary perspective. Mattocks et al., (2012) suggest for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) women veterans there may be a sense of shame which can hamper efforts at self-advocacy and may arise from perceptions regarding negative American attitudes toward war. Compatible with the ideas of Burnett and Segoria (2009), Whiteman et al., (2013) confirm women student veterans may have trouble connecting to their civilian counterparts, especially civilian students, and may be at risk for social isolation.

In the literature, there are opposing viewpoints on the importance of faculty and peer interactions and which of the two are more important to successful transitions. One perspective is that faculty interactions matter more than the interactions of student veterans with their peers. Vacchi (2012) claims that the “quality of contact between faculty and student veterans may be the most important nonfinancial key to ensuring the persistence of student veterans” (p. 20). The other perspective is the reverse of this that peers matter more. Burnett and Segoria (2009) identified the negative interactions with other students as the greatest barrier to college success. Other research acknowledges that student veterans do frequently seek contact with other veterans and military personnel as ways to validate their experiences and aid in successful transitions (DiRamio et al., 2008; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Seen as having difficulty in finding sources of support, student veterans appreciate opportunities to meet and interact with other veterans on campus (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Organizations such as the Student Veterans of

America (SVA) can play an important role in establishing and encouraging peer interactions (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). The SVA is a student based organization which has the primary purpose of providing peer-to-peer-networks, connecting student veterans to resources, and advocating on their behalf (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; SVA, 2008). The SVA is one resource to provide an avenue for the success of student veterans in higher education. Some women student veterans may struggle more than their male counterparts due to difficulties adapting to a situation where more women are present, such as a college campus (Ryan et al., 2011).

The scholarly investigations recently done by Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, and MacDermid Wadsworth (2013) compare the development and implications of emotional support from peers among student service members/veterans and civilian students. Participants of the longitudinal web-based survey included viewpoints from men ( $N=154$ ) and women ( $N=45$ ), veterans and men ( $N=81$ ), and women ( $N=100$ ) civilians (Whiteman et al., 2013). Using chi square tests and independent samples,  $t$  tests revealed student service members/veterans reported less emotional support from their peers compared with their civilian counterparts; emotional support from peers, however, increased similarly for both groups over time (Whiteman et al., 2013). Peer emotional support is generally related to better academic and mental health outcomes for groups, but the links between emotional support and mental health are stronger for civilian students (Whiteman et al., 2013). Thus, "...a complicating factor for some veterans seems to be relationship building with other students" (Ford et al., 2009, p. 66). Women student veterans may have constrained interactions with their faculty or their peers because of

mental health issues such as PTSD. A women student veteran with PTSD may have difficulty interacting with others particularly with authority figures such as faculty. They may also have problems with negative and constructive feedback either from faculty or their peers which may lead to not seeking help from either group (Church, 2009; Glover-Graf et al., 2010).

As women student veterans' transition from the military to college they are identified as nontraditional students, and several have psychological adjustments such as relearning study skills (Ryan et al., 2011). There are also social adjustments like becoming comfortable in the classroom environment and navigating the academic way of life which consists of policy and procedures different than that of the military. "Veterans may face a social and academic environment that does not always honor their work as soldiers or their efforts to get in and stay in college" (Glasser et al., 2009, p. 33). Advising student veterans on how to request accommodations, promote self-advocacy, and understand what to expect in the classroom setting are key tools for the woman student veteran toolbox (Glover-Graf, et al., 2010). Still, many may suffer from devastating combat related issues of PTSD, sexual abuse, and other mental health concerns not shared by civilian populations. Other key gender-based issues they face are sexual harassment and assault by other military personnel (Ackerman et al., 2009; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Sander, 2012b; Street & Stafford, 2004). Women student veterans on the college campus may also experience a lack of women veterans in faculty and staff positions to serve as role models and mentors. Veterans' services on campuses should evaluate peer support systems for this population. Expansion of availability and

support programs in college specifically for women student veterans can likely help them adjust both academically and socially to the college environment. The academic as well as the social acclimation to campus culture is of great importance for woman student veterans to be successful.

### **2.3 Related Research on Help-Seeking Behavior**

The research on help-seeking behavior in relation to women student veterans is small yet an attempt was made to extrapolate ideas from the research that is available. The factors and barriers for seeking treatment for MST and other V. A. services provide a foundation for understanding the complex phenomena of help-seeking. As student affairs professionals, we must be aware of the influence military experience has on the women student veteran as she transitions to college, particularly as it relates to help-seeking behavior. Mental health problems from these military experiences and exposure to combat may affect women student veterans' help-seeking behavior negatively, thus impacting college success (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). It is critical that the reader does not assume all women student veterans share the same experiences regarding mental health and seeking help.

One emerging framework for understating help-seeking behavior is the achievement related framework for help-seeking behavior in learning (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). The achievement-related framework for help-seeking behavior in learning (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985) conceptualizes help-seeking as an adaptive problem solving skill to be used in formal and informal learning situations. "By seeking instrumental help

from others when necessary, the learner can undertake more challenging tasks than he or she could otherwise. Help-seeking thus allows the learner to acquire and master increasingly complex skills.” (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985, p. 70). The phenomenon of help-seeking for women veteran students must consider the many changes occurring as the individual transitions from service member to civilian to student. The achievement-related framework for help-seeking behavior “...learning involves effecting changes in the individual’s knowledge state and skill repertoire it is not surprising that learners may seek help from others [to] affect such changes” (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985, p. 55). Understanding the development of help-seeking as a problem solving activity for women student veterans may lead to better understanding of how the individuals become aware of obstacles, how they view others on campus as a resource, and how they enlist others to help them attain their goals (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985).

The achievement-related framework for help-seeking behavior in learning acknowledges the existence of cognitive, developmental, and motivational characteristics of the help-seeker as well as situational and contextual characteristics of the helping interaction (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). This perspective removes the idea that help-seeking is dichotomous (i.e., seek help—not seek help) but rather as a multidimensional interpersonal process (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). This concept matches the multiple experiences women student veterans have as they process several transitions on the path to a college degree. There are multiple characteristics of the help-seeker (person variables), the target helper and nature of the problem (task variables), and the suitability of the means employed to gain assistance (strategy variables) (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985).

This research study explores the multiple characteristics of women student veterans (person variables), the situations or events they face as students (task variables), and the ways in which they go about seeking help from available resources intentionally (strategy variables). The skills involved in help-seeking are examined for self-disclosed behavior activities in which the women student veteran is thought to be engaged prior to, during, and after seeking help (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). Utilizing adults and peers as resources to cope with difficulties is an important skill (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). The idea of seeking help by the women student veteran can be put into context in the college setting by focusing on the when, where, and how often women student veterans “engage” or “seek-help” from institutional resources, including peers, when challenges occur throughout their collegiate experience.

Research does exist about identified factors associated with people’s reluctance to seek professional help (Komiya et al., 2000). Per Komiya and others (2000): “Women hold more favorable attitudes toward psychological help-seeking and use more psychological services than do men suggesting that gender and gender roles play a part in help-seeking behavior” (p. 138). Though this may be true for civilian students, this may not be the case for women student veterans. Komiya and others (2000) focused on fear of expressing strong emotions as a key factor in the reluctance to seek help. Although fear of expressing strong emotions was indeed important regarding whether a student sought professional help, no students in their study were identified as veterans, thus it is difficult to apply their results to women student veterans. Nadler (1983) identified several internal factors for why students did not seek help: (1) students having a strong

belief in individualism, (2) having low interpersonal dependency, (3) reluctance to self-disclosure and (4) the tendency to conceal distressing and negative personal information. Other external factors that cause students to be reluctant in seeking professional help were low socioeconomic status and ethnic and minority status (Nadler, 1983).

Military experiences may influence and possibly deter women student veterans from seeking help with their academic pursuits. Women in the military, during both training and service, are reluctant to allow others to help them, even for tasks that require physical strength (Herbert, 1998). Such factors are consistent with maintaining the emotional and psychological strength expected of military members (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Baechtold & De Sawal (2009) argue the typical situations that are stressful or difficult for traditional college women likely will not affect women veterans in the same manner.

It appears that women veterans do not seek VA services for PTSD and MST for several reasons. In one study, Corbett (2007) addresses the low occurrences of women veterans seeking help at VA facilities for PTSD. Possible explanations for women veterans' not seeking treatment for PTSD include suffering from invisibility and delayed recognition of symptoms (Corbett, 2007). Other factors preventing women veterans from seeking help include: their having primary parenting roles that need to be established thus they shift their own needs to that of the family, feeling shame following sexual trauma and not wanting to revisit the experience, and not being encouraged to seek help by their spouses where men are more encouraged to do so (Corbett, 2007). Another potential reason for women student veterans not seeking help is that they must live up to the false

expectations: not to burden others with their problems (Vacchi, 2012). Not being a burden may also explain why women student veterans may not self-identify. If no one knows that the student is a veteran, then there is no shame in asking for help; the veteran may feel that she has better access to help (Vacchi 2012).

Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) address several barriers for women seeking treatment for MST. The information they provide is anecdotal due to the lack of actual data provided or references. Understanding how women veterans process and make meaning of their college experience was one portion of inquiry in the study (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). The other component of the study was understanding the influences that combat experiences may have on the college experience (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). They use a framework of identity development through meaning making, where the individual constructs knowledge of oneself, based on individual learning and experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). “The multiple cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions that influence how women veterans make meaning of their military experiences do not always connect with how they view themselves or how others on campus view them” (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, p. 39). The authors proclaim that women veterans go through these traumatic experiences yet don’t seek help to work through them because of their military experiences, not considering themselves to be a veteran and having their focus shift from self to family obligations (Herbert, 1998; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Mattocks et al., 2012). Further, “...because women’s roles and experiences in the military are often minimized or misunderstood by family, friends and healthcare professionals, women



themselves tend to minimize their contributions” (Mattocks et al., 2012, p. 543). These three key ideas put forward by the authors should be taken as a guide to better understand women student veterans’ help-seeking behaviors. Another factor to consider is women student veterans’ low level of trust in the average American (Vacchi, 2012). This is different from their military experience where being responsible for your soldier was valued.

#### **2.4 Summary Including Recommendations from the Literature**

Better understanding of military culture and structure can inform higher education institutions about these women student veterans and what policies may guide them to success. Cate (2011) suggests taking into consideration the long-term effects of student veterans’ mental health, academic performance, success-time-to-degree, completion and withdrawal rates, and other factors that promote or hinder success. Researchers who investigate student veterans must also be cognizant of the approach to which they do so. An abundance of the existing literature on student veterans focus on their pathologies, problems, and shortcomings (Hassan, Jackson, McCabe, & Sanders, 2010). Hassan and others (2010), in their survey incorporating inquiries about consistent and pervasive images of student veterans by other students, sought to advocate for and acknowledge the strengths and potential of student veterans.

Rumann and Hamrick (2009) add to the literature about supporting student veterans in the transition from military to college and offer frameworks and considerations for student affairs professionals. In the design of transitional services,

campus personnel should initiate partnerships with veteran's organizations and local military representatives (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). External partnerships offer collaborations with veteran's services and organizations that honor the multiple roles of student and veteran that women student veterans simultaneously experience (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Encouraging these campus partnerships coincides with the support student veterans are already seeking from veterans' offices. It is important, however, not to have the VA handle all veterans' issues but rather the institution model services where it can to integrate the various roles of the women student veteran (Rumann & Hamrick 2009).

Future research should consider the need for women student veterans to have faculty and staff who can serve as mentors. "Female veterans on campus are less likely than males to find same gender role models in faculty and staff" (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, p. 40). The interactions between women student veterans and other students is equally important in providing support for this student population. There is strong suggestion that women student veterans may need this support even more so than men. They will need to find other women with whom to connect due to their probable traumatic experiences of combat, PTSD, and MST (Baechtold & De Sawal 2009). Environments must be created on campus where women student veterans can feel comfortable and supported.

Vacchi (2012) suggests, in his commentary on the Twenty-First Century student veteran, that colleges and universities "...should give every reasonable consideration to student veterans..." (p. 19). Student veterans face unique obstacles when attending

college and policy modifications can be made to increase the likelihood that student veterans will succeed (Vacchi, 2012). Vacchi (2012) advocates for special policies such as: special considerations on college applications and test scores, access to early registration, restricted courses, and extended payment deadlines. The focus is unclear when it is mentioned that these policies and practices do not require a student to self-identify. What is clear is emphasis from student veterans that they want flexibility and convenience in the delivery of academic programs and support services (Ford et al., 2009). Colleges can hinder student veteran success by putting in place unreasonable obstacles. Two key institutional obstacles that are points of frustration and stress for student veterans are: the awarding of credit for military service and the awarding of transfer credit for college courses taken while serving in the military (Vacchi, 2012). Others agree that government bureaucracy and navigating college processes are barriers to becoming part of the academic community (Glover-Graf et al, 2010; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Contractual and financial matters along with needs for advising and counseling assistance are barriers (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). For some women student veterans who are National Guard or reserve, reactivations and redeployments, cause “...simultaneous statuses as veterans, service members and students” (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009, p. 29). Academic programs such as distance learning courses can allow for the flexibility and convenience which women student veterans seek while also enhancing their success (Ford et al., 2009). In the end, the confusing expectations for women student veterans to resolve unpredictable disruptions, navigate their education

benefits and financial assistance, and initiate personal relationships with civilian faculty and students are great.

It is recommended that the dialogue about veterans be positive. Vacchi (2012) criticizes existing literature implying that some scholars are exaggerating the difficulties of student veterans based on improper inferences from larger veteran population stereotypes. Contemporary literature on women student veterans' transition difficulties from the military to college are lacking and yet those that do exist (Ackerman et al., 2009; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009) lack empirical evidence. Vacchi (2012) argues that few qualitative inquiries exist and those that do, do not show any more transition difficulty than other students. In fact, history suggests that veterans not only adjust well to campus but equally or better than their nonveteran peers in the classroom and on their way to earning their degrees (Vacchi, 2012). Ultimately [women] student veterans are expected to succeed due to their heightened sense of mission accomplishment from behavior learned from their military service (Vacchi, 2012). "Those students with military experience and those associated in some manner with the military.... constitute a most valued constituency because of their maturity, desire to excel, and character" (Ford et al., 2009, p. 64). Vacchi (2012) recognizes that, unlike veterans from previous wars, today's contemporary veteran comes from a professional all-volunteer military with high quality training and deployments around the world. The same viewpoint continues to exist as we understand that women student veterans have global experiences by living abroad and experiences with innovation, accountability, and responsibility (O'Herrin, 2011). Erin O'Herrin, former Associate Director for the American Council on Education

adds: “The influx of veterans into our institutions provides new opportunities for the enrichment of classroom discussion and the enhancement of campus diversity” (p. 15).

Suggestions for future research include having more current models of theories associated with women’s development on military training and the realities of war (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Inviting women student veterans to present their perspectives on relevant topics in areas such as student activities, financial aid, or student health, is another suggestion for future research (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Gender specific services, accessible counselors and advisors well versed on veteran needs, faculty mentors and new services such as childcare and outside advocacy agencies also need to be implemented (Mattocks et al., 2012). The academic and social structures within academe are not like the military, therefore navigating the new environment is necessary for success (Ackerman, et al., 2009). Providing a veteran-friendly campus which encompasses the needs of women veterans can only benefit the institution. A veteran-friendly campus is one where programs and people are in place to assist with the transitions between college and military (Ackerman, et al., 2009).

Women student veterans are a growing population of students on campus who have unique needs. The literature about women student veterans adapting and overcoming challenges can be improved. To address these unique needs, the system of support must not be a system designed for men. The transition issues that women student veterans experience is multifaceted and varied. Some women student veterans are challenged by physical disabilities and/or psychological issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder and military sexual trauma. Although this study does not delve into the

occurrences of physical trauma experienced by women veterans, many have been wounded in action.

Adjustments returning to civilian life, such as re-establishing family relationships and roles, can be stressful. Couple these adjustments with going to college and the women student veteran faces additional challenges with being a student. Rumann and Hammrick (2009) state this area of study matters because "...learning about the military, war and combat, and service members' experiences could complement a campus's broader commitment to diversity and social understanding" (p. 31). Raising awareness of the experiences of women student veterans is the first step toward promoting and developing effective support systems (Rumann & Hammrick, 2009). This research study takes that idea a step further and suggests that finding ways to encourage help-seeking behavior should be a goal as well when assisting women student veterans.

The literature presented here was written to provide relevancy of women student veterans' experiences to the study of higher education. This chapter identified sets of concepts, i.e. self-help behavior, military and college culture transitions, and the unique challenges faced by women student veterans. The purpose was to express to the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on the topic of women student veterans and their help-seeking behaviors. There exists strengths and weaknesses in many of the studies presented here, particularly with empirical research lacking (Vacchi, 2012). This literature review was defined by the guiding concept which is to investigate the experiences of women student veterans in relation to their help-seeking behaviors while in college. The research objective is to increase awareness of women student veterans'

help-seeking behaviors, synthesizing the results to improve engagement. It is important to not only recognize the specific needs of women student veterans but also to emphasize that it is impossible to take a one-size-fits-all approach. Although there is a request for empirical research in this area, that research design seems unsatisfactory for the purposes of this study. O'Herrin (2011) recognizes that direct input from the enrolled student veteran population is the best approach to designing supportive programs. Understanding the self-help behavior of women student veterans calls for an exploratory study of qualitative design. The success of programs for women student veterans can be crafted with contribution from the students themselves.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter displays the study's qualitative methodology, including data collection and data analysis, to determine themes and rich descriptions of reported experiences. Therefore, a qualitative methodological design was applied. Qualitative research is "...the appropriate method when asking questions about people's experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 33). A phenomenological approach was applied to this study to seek and understand the experiences women student veterans. The aim of phenomenology is to explore and make meaning of how participants make sense of their personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. In addition, the events that caused them to seek help and the resources they utilized are described.

Previous qualitative phenomenological research about women veterans has been conducted using a variety of methods. These methods include open-ended questions (Ackerman et al., 2009), focus groups (Glover-Graf et al., 2010), and in-depth interviews (Herbert, 1998). Following these previous concepts, the methods of data collection for this study involved personal interviews, a demographic survey, and an online survey. The online survey results were used to validate data captured from the in-person interviews. A description of the methods of data collection including participant selection and recruitment, site locations, the interview process, online survey sampling, and data analysis is provided in this chapter.



The research questions to be addressed are:

1. Does the prior military experience of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help?
2. What are the events that cause women student veterans to seek help?
3. What are the resources that women student veterans utilize?

### **3.1.1 Participant selection.**

The research sample initially sought to include only those women veterans of Operations Iraqi Freedom and/or Enduring Freedom who are also undergraduate students. Vacchi (2012) agreed the research focus surrounding veterans should be on undergraduates because support structures from military and degree programs are not adequate for active duty and graduates. “With roughly 90 percent of the student veteran population fitting the undergraduate student veteran description, programming [and research] should clearly focus on these students” (Vacchi, 2012, p. 20). The selection of 9 women veteran student participants for this study, however, had to be expanded to include women veterans from any timeframe as well as those who were graduate students or retired military. The number of participants selected was based on previous samples used in qualitative research with veterans. Previous research inclusive of women veterans using in-depth interviews have used similar samples between 2 and 19 women veterans (N=2, Murphy, 2011); (N=5, Wilson et al., 2013); (N=6, Ackerman et al., 2009); (N=14, Herbert, 1998); (N=19, Mattocks et al., 2012). The research focus is on women

veteran student's help-seeking behavior experiences while in college, and therefore women student veterans were the primary objective.

The sample population was recruited via communications with the Director of the Veterans Student Services Center (VSS) on the university's main campus and via direct e-mail to identified students. Recruitment of participants was non-randomized. Purposive sampling was used to elicit participants with specific characteristics (Patton, 2002). Sampling strategies for phenomenological studies include criteria where all the participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). The criteria for participation in the study included participant veterans who serve(d) in both active duty and/or reserve components. Other inclusion criteria for the study was set so the sample included participants who were: 1) 18 years or older, 2) English-speaking, 3) enrolled and attending the selected college at least part-time (6 credit hours). Participants were not specifically included or excluded based on a mental health diagnosis (depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and military sexual trauma), substance use, or combat experiences or lack thereof. As research participants were identified, they were asked to provide recommendations and referrals of other women student veterans, which did not produce any results.

### **3.1.2 Site location.**

Nine in person interviews were conducted by the researcher at a large public, research university located in the Southeastern United States (University A). University A resides in a metropolitan area and offers its students a variety of undergraduate,

graduate, and professional degree programs. A private meeting room space located in the university's library was identified and reserved for the first interview with Snow.

Interviews 4-8 were conducted in a private meeting room space located in two other academic buildings on campus. The ninth interview took place at a public eatery located off campus approximately 100 miles away. The request was made by this participant to meet publicly, which the researcher permitted.

## **3.2 Data Collection**

### **3.2.1 Interviews.**

The preliminary steps prior to collecting data included meeting any stipulations made by University A's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A). Data was collected by interviewing nine women student veterans. This number coincides with Polkinghorne (1989) who recommends that in phenomenological research interviews should have between 5 to 25 individuals. Participants were contacted first by e-mail to confirm their interest and willingness to participate in the study. Each participant was asked to provide a contact number to reach them to discuss the purpose of the study and determine a meeting location to conduct the interview. Rapport was established when the researcher first spoke with each participant and determined the location, date and time to meet. After the meeting location, date and times were identified, the researcher then spoke personally with study participants offering time to ask questions prior to the face to face meeting. The type of interview conducted was one-on-one semi-structured interviewing: "For one-on-one interviews the researcher will need participants who are

not hesitant to speak and share ideas...” (Creswell, 2013). The one-on-one interviews allowed for the participants to feel comfortable talking about any difficult topics such as combat or military sexual trauma experiences. This approach also allowed participants the privacy of an individual appointment, rather than a group setting, while also providing rich data not available from surveys (Strong, 2013). In the semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to guide and facilitate, rather than strictly dictate what could be allowed to occur during the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The interview process was approached with compassion and sensitivity. The interview consisted of 13 open-ended questions (Appendix C). The questions developed by the researcher were to be broad to allow the discussion to be participant directed. In addition, the questions posed to participants were based upon the literature and not personal experiences of the researcher. Table 2 outlines the connection between the theoretical framework employed in the study, the research questions, and interview questions.

*Table 2: Relationship between Theoretical Framework, Research Questions, and Interview Questions*

Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1984)	Research Questions	Interview Questions:
Self	1. Does the prior military experience of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help?	1, 2, 4, 5
Situation	2. What are the events that cause women student veterans to seek help?	3, 6, 8, 9
Support	3. What are the resources that women student veterans utilize when seeking help?	7, 10, 11, 12, 13
Strategies	Help-seeking behavior as coping response	

Interview questions 1, 2, 4, and 5 were asked during the interview to provide rich input and help answer Research Question 1. These questions explored categories and themes relating to whether the military was perceived as influential to the help-seeking behavior of the study participant. Interview questions 3, 6, 8 and 9 provided information to answer Research Question 2. These questions revealed categories and themes related to the events and situations where the women student veterans sought help and what came from that experience. The interview questions 7, 10, 11, 12, and 13 provided information to answer Research Question 3. These questions discovered information related to the resources used by study participants when seeking help; these resources include family, friends, university services and staff, the VA, or any other resources. This form of interviewing allowed both the participant and researcher to engage in dialogue where questions were tailored per participant responses. The researcher also chose at times to inquire about topics which required further investigation.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher greeted the participant, directed the participant to the interview space, and established rapport. All participants were asked to review a consent form (Appendix B). Next, each participant was educated on the nature of the study. The interviewee was then informed of the purpose of the study, the amount of time allowed for the interview (between 60 - 90 minutes), and plans for results of the interview. The researcher reviewed the interview procedure and emphasized confidentiality. The researcher responded to any unanswered questions posed by the participants. Next, participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire utilizing Qualtrics software, which took approximately three to five

minutes (Appendix D). The data from the questionnaire was used to provide a participant synopsis of demographic data covered in Chapter 4: Results.

The researcher exercised patience and flexibility with handling emotional responses and any technical disruptions. The interviews were recorded and stored using an audio recording device. The researcher also took descriptive and reflective notes. These observational field notes (personal observations, impressions, non-verbal and other) aided the data gathering process and contributed to a more extensive description of each research participant. The researcher recorded and reflected on the setting, activities during the interview, and any personal insights. After each interview the participant received a gift card, an incentive for inclusion in the study. Finally, the participants were thanked for participating in the interview and assurances were made regarding confidentiality of responses.

### **3.2.2 Online survey.**

An online survey (Appendix E), a combination of the 17 demographic and 13 interview questions were also included in data collection. The sample for the online survey was obtained from the institution's knowledge management system and sorted. Of the 285 students communicated with in fall 2017, 8 students participated in the online survey. The responses to the online survey can be found in Appendix E. A more detailed description of how the responses from the online survey help to enhance the findings for this dissertation is provided in Chapter Four: Results.

### **3.2.3 Summary of data collection.**

The purpose of conducting interviews was to seek answers to the research questions stated previously. Immediately following each interview, the recorded session and written notes were stored using multiple sources for storing electronic and written data. The anonymity of participants was ensured throughout all phases of the study, particularly the stored data. No information that would be able to identify the participants was included in the recordings and all names used in this final report are pseudonyms. The steps of data collection in this study were: (1) gaining IRB approval (Appendix A), (2) finding and building rapport with a purposeful sample, (3) selection of site location (4) conducting and recording of interviews and (5) collecting responses from the online survey and (6) storing the data while dealing with any field issues. The following section describes the data analysis.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Analysis of data for qualitative research is done in constant interaction with the data. “Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175). Like other qualitative research, analyzing the data involved synthesizing the data received into a clear description of what the researcher has observed regarding the phenomenon. In this phenomenological study, data from the interviews were analyzed to understand the participant’s experiences and to develop categories and patterns seeking meaning (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Merriam (2009) suggests the challenge of the phenomenological approach is to construct categories that reveal recurring patterns in

the data. To uncover the essence of the phenomena in this study, categories were identified by repeatedly reviewing interview transcriptions, researcher notations, and observational notes. Categories were then grouped using thematic clustering and provided a classification system that reflected and identified recurring patterns. Forming clusters of categories and patterns is a useful way to organize and present the findings as meaningful themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Fink, 2003; Grbich, 2009). Once the recurring themes became redundant and no new information was forthcoming, the data was considered saturated (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 2009; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to move through these phases of inquiry to see something, a pattern, which has not been evident to others.

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology of data analysis was followed in this study. The IPA, a procedure is best explained as a series of six interconnected stages that help the researcher understand the lived experiences of the participants while in college (Smith et al., 2009). These stages are described as follows:

***Reading and re-reading.*** In the initial step, the researcher organized and grouped the data systematically per the root of the data (MacDonald, 2013). The researcher recorded and organized the content of the interview that is germane to the data collecting process using Microsoft Word. Creswell (2014) advocated that a prepared, systematic method should be used for the data analysis. Once the data were organized, the researcher moved to the next step.



***Initial noting.*** Step 2 involved reading and becoming acquainted with the ideas and concepts of the data. The researcher reflected on the themes of the information as examined. The researcher explored the tone, patterns that link the data, recurring ideas, and a sense of reliability for the gathered information (Creswell, 2014). This researcher was looking at the various responses particularly to the protocol questions to find specific words or ideas that reoccur. Per Nduna and Jewkes (2011), the researcher should make note of the outlier views (i.e., keep a list) as he reads the data to discover the individual's perceptions, positions, and thoughts about something purely by observing the words they use to verbalize themselves.

***Developing emergent themes.*** Step 3 involved coding, giving the developed themes; consequently, by achieving this, groupings or classes of evidence were freely generated and created (Creswell, 2014). The researcher should use a blend of predetermined and evolving codes based on the literature review to gain insight (Creswell, 2014). After coding the recorded data, the researcher moved on to Step 4. At Step 4, the researcher categorized and generated thorough descriptions of the participants, setting, or themes that impact the analysis.

***Searching for connections across emerging themes.*** Step 4 was the level of the analysis that was investigating connections to tie together the emergent themes and to create a structure to detect the most noteworthy or important themes. In the previous steps, only the first interview of the study went through the analysis process. Then the researcher utilized the steps to analyze the remainder of the interviews. Smith et al. (2009) recommended that not every evolving theme need to be included within step of

study, which was relatively contingent based largely on the overall research question and its scope. Then, the second-time transcripts were coded, the emerging themes were grouped under categories linked to the objectives of the study and research questions. This formed a second list of emerging themes for every contributor (Blanchard, 2012).

***Moving to the next case.*** In Step 5, the researcher presented the findings by using narrative passages. Narrative passages are used to communicate the conclusions of the analysis (Creswell, 2014). Per McAdams (2012), by studying the narrative passages with an unobstructed and detecting mindset, the researcher could seek ideas that registered as notably significant, recurring, unexpected, or possibly revealing central themes and issues.

***Looking for patterns across cases.*** Step 6 involved the researcher's interpretation of the data. This was accomplished by comparing the results with what was expected and with the original program goals, indicators, and research questions (Williams, 2014). Upon completion of the participant interviews, the data were examined for large overall concepts. The original transcripts, audio recordings, observational notes, and participant feedback were scrutinized through line-by-line analysis on numerous occasions to thoroughly explore participants' words in depth and to capture the true essence and meaning of their answers and stories. Heavily influenced by Moustakas (1994) and Smith et al. (2009), phenomenological method of data analysis as previously described, the researcher also developed an innovative process to identify these preliminary concepts and themes that were presented in the data.

An initial analysis which incorporated Interactive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) steps 1-3, and a secondary analysis which incorporated the remaining steps 4-6, (Smith et al., 2009) were conducted. This division was purposeful to allow the reader to follow the analysis to thematic conclusion. The initial analysis consisted of categorization of participant's interview responses into factors. These factors are then supported by narrative passages from the interviewee. In step three of the initial analysis, abstract themes are documented. The factors which emerged from the initial analysis were analyzed for both general and emerging themes. Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf, and Spencer (2011) suggest a general theme indicates that all participants (i.e., nine) made a comment corresponding to that theme. An emerging theme signified that fewer than 50% or less (i.e., one to two) of the participants made such a response. This process was a guide for this portion on analysis although not strictly adhered. The data, indexed and merged into a content matrix and pattern recognition chart, were also repeatedly analyzed and studied to address the research questions. In the initial analysis, the data were categorized and placed in tables that reflect the researcher's notes, verbatim examples and formation of themes. The overall objective of this first analysis stage is to become aware of the data and participant responses (Smith & Olsen, 2003). The data were further analyzed using concise statements to aid in the formulation of themes. The objective of this stage is to recognize transparent categories and understand how they connect to the data (Smith & Olsen, 2003).

In part two, the secondary analysis presents a collection of responses spanning the interview questions and abstract themes. Through continuous analyzing of data, the

researcher identified emergent themes. A structure was designed to detect the most noteworthy or important themes which are linked to the objectives of this study and research questions. Tables 6, 7, and 8 illustrate the thematic connections to the research questions. The design of the study included an online survey which captured an additional eight women student veteran responses (Appendix E). This additional data validates the in-person interviews' emergent themes in response to the research questions. This procedure improved the trustworthiness of the findings of this study.

#### Initial Analysis: Women Student Veteran Perceptions

The initial analysis follows Smith et al. (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which explores data for themes from participant interpretations. The 6 steps required in the IPA process are covered in chapter three. The initial analysis in identifying themes involve, (1) becoming aware of the data and participant responses, through reading and re-reading, (2) recognizing transparent categories through initial noting, and (3) identifying more vivid and recurrent categories to begin developing themes (Smith et al., 2009).

The researcher conducted an initial analysis of each study participant's response to the interview questions (Appendix C). Interview questions 1, 2, 4, and 5 were asked during the interview to provide rich input and help answer Research Question 1. Findings from these questions relay whether the study participant believed the military to be influential to her help-seeking behavior. Interview questions 3, 6, 8 and 9 provided information to answer Research Question 2. These questions revealed categories related to the events that cause women student veterans to seek help. The interview questions 7,

10, 11, 12, and 13 provided information to answer Research Question 3. These questions revealed categories relating to the resources that women student veterans utilize when seeking help; these resources include family, friends, university services and staff, the VA, or any other resources.

The results of the initial analysis document the researcher's initial notes. This section also includes concise statements. Smith and Osborn (2003) state, the aim is to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text. Following each introduction of study participant, tables are provided to display this first stage of analysis. The findings offered the expressions from the women student veterans which are significant enough to allow the formation of abstract connections. These theoretical connections, per Smith and Olsen (2003), are within and across cases but are still grounded in the particularity of the specific thing said.

#### Secondary Analysis: Emergent Themes

The data was indexed by the researcher using initial and secondary systems of analyses. The data was at the completion of the secondary analysis incorporated into a content matrix corresponding with the theoretical framework of this study. This section provided analyzed data and how it was studied to address the research questions and develop themes. The researcher examined implications and conclusions grounded upon the results of the women student veteran responses which are discussed in Chapter 5.

This chapter provided a transparent method for this study's collection and analysis of the data. The semi-structured interviews and online survey were chosen for the primary method of data collection and analysis because of their ability to elicit rich descriptions

and a more detailed understanding of the phenomenon of help-seeking. The selection of nine women student veterans was done through purposive sampling. The site location for the collection of data was a large public metropolitan research university described as “University A” for the purposes of this study. All the university’s Institutional Review Board processes and interview protocol were followed. The data collection method included purposive sampling conducted over an 11-month period. Interviewing provided textual data in the form of the participants’ constructions, reconstructions, and projections regarding the phenomenon of help-seeking. The interviews also provided historical and contextual information. The data obtained from the interviews were transcribed allowing for an easier read-through by the researcher. The coding portion of data analysis helped to move unsorted data progressively to more developed categories or themes. The successive levels of coding done in the analysis provided the researcher with documented and well-organized answers to the research questions. The coding results were integrated in this final report.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

This chapter describes the experiences of women student veterans and their help-seeking behaviors. The responses provided by the nine women student veterans were scrutinized in detail to develop emergent themes among responses. The conceptual framework for the study assisted in the analysis and discussion in relation to the thematic findings. In this chapter a participant synopsis is provided which captures the demographic data collected from the nine study participants. Following the participant synopsis, the results from the interviews in response to the research questions are discussed. A summary concludes this chapter.

### **4.1 Participant Synopsis**

The participant synopsis captures the demographic data and exposes the diversity of study participants. Tables 3, 4, and 5 illustrate the results from the researcher-originated online demographic survey (Appendix D). Table 3 displays the study participants' responses regarding age, race, branch serve(d) in the armed forces, and combined years of military service. Table 4 displays the participants' responses regarding degree/major, academic standing, college experience, and parents' college experience. Table 5 displays responses regarding combat experience in the military, service connected disability, treatment for a service connected disability, and reserve duty. The study participants were diverse in many of the demographic categories. This diversity does reflect the diversity of women in the military where minority women represent 33 % of the women veteran population (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).

*Table 3: Demographic Information of Women Student Veteran Participants: Age, Race, Branch, and Years of Military Service*

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Branch</i>	<i>Years</i>
Snow	30	White	Navy	6
Cindy	56	American Indian or Alaska Native, White	Air Force	21
Mulan	34	Asian	Air Force	2
Ariel	30	White	Coast Guard	9
Merida	27	White	USMC	5
Aurora	51	Hispanic or Latino, White	Air Force	8.5
Belle	33	White	Army National Guard	5
Tiana	20	Black or African American	Army National Guard	6
Elsa	48	American Indian or Alaska Native	Air Force Reserves	10.5

*Table 4: Demographic Information of Women Student Veteran Participants: Degree/Major, Academic Standing, College Experience, and Parent's College Experience.*

	<i>Degree/Major</i>	<i>Academic Standing</i>	<i>Experience</i>	<i>Parent's College</i>
Snow	Anthropology	Senior	Transfer	No
Cindy	Applied Learning	Graduate	Returning	Yes
Mulan	Biology	Junior	Transfer	No
Ariel	Psychology	Junior	Transfer	Maybe/Not Sure
Merida	Social Science	Sophomore	Transfer	No
Aurora	Social Work	Senior	Transfer	No
Belle	Human	Junior	Transfer	No
Tiana	Communication	Sophomore	Transfer	Yes
Elsa	Psychology	Junior	Transfer	Yes



*Table 5: Demographic Information of Women Student Veteran Participants: Combat Related Experience, Service Connected Disability, Treatment for Service Connected Disability and Being in the Reserves*

	<i>Combat Related</i>	<i>Service Connected Disability</i>	<i>Treatment for Service Connected Disability</i>	<i>Reserves</i>
Snow	Maybe/Not Sure	Yes	Yes	No
Cindy	Combo	Yes	Yes	No
Mulan	No	No	No	No
Ariel	Maybe/Not Sure	No	No	No
Merida	Combo	Yes	Maybe/Not Sure	No
Aurora	No	Yes	Maybe/Not Sure	No
Belle	Combo	Yes	No	No
Tiana	Combo	No	No	Yes
Elsa	Yes	Yes	No	No

Snow: “There are interesting experiences as female vets.”

Snow is a 30-year old White female who is full-time senior majoring in Anthropology. She is taking live courses at the main campus of University A. She is an undergraduate transfer from the same state college system and receiving military education benefits. Snow is single and lives off campus. Neither of Snow’s parents attended college. Snow is a veteran of the United States Navy and served 6 years. She resigned from the Navy with honorable discharge due to being physically incapable to perform assigned duties. Snow is not in active duty status nor is she a member of a reserve unit. She responded “maybe/not sure” regarding her military experience as combat related. Snow experienced 1 deployment to an undisclosed location. She answered “Yes” she did have a service-connected disability and “Yes” she was receiving

services for treatment of a service-connected disability. Snow was interviewed in spring of 2016 and was the first participant of the study. The interview experience helped to shape future interview protocol on location site. The interview proceeded without incident.

Cindy: “And if there’s a crisis, what do you do? Who do you call? I’m not gonna be able to finish the course, how’s that gonna affect my GI Bill?”

Cindy is a 56-year old White and American Indian (or Alaska Native) female who is a full-time Graduate student pursuing her Master’s degree in Applied Learning and Instruction. She responded “Yes” she was utilizing military educational benefits at the time of our discussion. She is taking live courses at the main campus of University A. Cindy is divorced and lives off campus. One or both of her parents went to college. Cindy is a veteran of the United States Air Force and served 21 years. She retired from the Air Force with honorable discharge. Cindy is not in active duty nor is she a member of a reserve unit. She responded “Combination or combat and non-combat” regarding her military experience as combat-related. She answered “Yes” to having a service-connected disability and “Yes” to receiving any services for treatment of a service-connected disability. This interview was the second interview conducted in the study and the interview where the location site changed from the library to a meeting room space in one of the college’s academic buildings. This meeting was also the interview which took the longest amount of time at one hour and fifty minutes. The researcher noted that Cindy

would laugh after each time she mentioned getting help or referencing help. The interview proceeded without incident.

Mulan: "...you can't spot a vet. I mean, especially when it comes to female...."

Mulan is a 34-year old Asian female who is a full-time junior majoring in Biology. She is taking live courses at the main campus of University A. She is an undergraduate transfer from an out of state community college and is receiving military education benefits. Mulan is single and lives off campus. Neither of her parents attended college. Her career goal is to be a physician. Mulan is a veteran of the United States Air Force and served 6 years. She resigned from the Air Force with honorable discharge. Mulan is not in active duty status nor is she currently a member of a reserve unit. She responded "No" regarding her military experience as combat-related. Mulan experienced 1 deployment to Japan. She answered "No" she did not have a service-connected disability nor was she receiving any treatment of a service-connected disability. There were occasions throughout the interview when Mulan began crying, particularly when discussing a time when she sought help from a Chaplain in the military. This helped shape future interview protocol to include the researcher having tissues in possession. Upon arrival of the interview location site parties were informed that the air conditioning unit in the building was broken. An alternative location was suggested to Mulan who assured the researcher that the selected location was suitable. The interview then proceeded without incident.

Ariel: “Honestly, I don’t really have anybody right now.”

Ariel is a 30-year old White female who is a full-time junior majoring in Psychology. She is taking live courses at the main campus of University A. She is an undergraduate transfer from the same state college system and receiving military education benefits. Ariel is married and lives off campus. Ariel was not sure if one or both of her parents attended college. Ariel is a veteran of the United States Coast Guard and served 9 years. She resigned from the Coast Guard with honorable discharge. Ariel is not in active duty status nor is she a member of a reserve unit. She responded “No” regarding her military experience as combat related. She answered “No” to having a service-connected disability nor was she receiving any treatment of a service-connected disability. Ariel was the only study participant whom had first completed the online survey but with a follow up e-mail communication agreed to conduct the in-person interview. The interview proceeded without incident.

Merida: “I don’t even feel like I counted in the military.”

Merida is a 27-year old White female who is a full-time sophomore majoring in Social Science Education. She is taking live courses at the main campus of University A. She is an undergraduate transfer from an out of state community college and is receiving military education benefits. Merida is married and lives off campus. Neither of her parents attended college. Her career goal is to teach social science education. Merida is a veteran of the United States Marine Corp and served 5 years. She resigned from the Marine Corp with honorable discharge due to being physically incapable to perform

assigned duties. Merida is not in active duty status nor is she a member of a reserve unit. She responded “combination of combat and non-combat” regarding her military experience as combat related. Merida experienced 2 deployments to Afghanistan. She answered “Yes” she did have a service-connected disability and “maybe/not sure” if she was receiving any treatment for a service-connected disability. There were occasions throughout the interview when Merida began crying. Merida was the first interview of three to be held on the same day. The interview proceeded without incident.

Aurora: “So not going and not being involved is more out of convenience, not so much desire.”

Aurora is a 51-year old White and Hispanic or Latina female. She is a full-time undergraduate senior majoring in Social Work. Aurora is also working on obtaining a minor in Non-Profit Management. She takes live courses at the main campus of University A. She is an undergraduate transfer from an in-state community college and is receiving military education benefits. Aurora is married and lives off campus. Neither of her parents attended college. Aurora is a veteran of the United States Air Force and served 8.5 years. She resigned from the Air Force with honorable discharge due to humanitarian circumstances. Aurora is not an active duty status nor is she a member of a reserve unit. She responded “No” regarding her military experience as combat-related. Aurora experienced 2 overseas deployments to Korea and Iceland. She answered “Yes” she did have a service-connected disability. She responded “Maybe/not sure” as to whether she was receiving any services for treatment of a service-connected disability.

At approximately 33 minutes into the interview there was an interruption in the meeting room space; the space was being secured. The interview continued without incident thereafter.

Belle: "...I flew off into another country and lived in a tent for a year."

Belle is a 33-year old White female who is full-time junior majoring in Human Communications and taking live courses at the main campus. She is an undergraduate transfer student from the same state college system and currently receiving military education benefits. Belle is divorced with no children and currently lives off campus. Neither of Belle's parents attended college. Her career goal is to work in the Human Resource field. Belle is a veteran of the Army National Guard having served 5 years, leaving with honorable discharge due to being physically incapable to perform assigned duties. Belle is not in active duty status nor a currently a member of a reserve unit. She responded on the survey "combination of combat and non-combat" regarding her military experience as combat related. Belle experienced one deployment overseas to Kuwait. She answered that she did have a service-connected disability but was at the time of the interview not receiving services for treatment of a service-connected disability. The interview was interrupted at four minutes and ten seconds into the interview. The interruption was caused by a faculty member confirming the use of the meeting room. The interview proceeded without incident thereafter. Belle showed emotion by crying throughout certain periods of the interview. Belle was the final interview of a series of three interviews having been conducted on the same day.

Tiana: “I feel like college is just...gives you the opportunity to do something more with your life.”

Tiana is a 20-year old Black female who is full-time sophomore majoring in Communication Sciences and Disorders. This is her second selection of major; the first was Forensic Science. Tiana takes live courses at the main campus. She is an undergraduate transfer student from the same state college system and currently receiving military education benefits. Tiana is single with no children and lives off campus. Tiana is not a first-generation student; one or both of her parents attended college. She did not share her career goal outside of getting an advanced degree. Tiana is a veteran of the Army National Guard having served 2 years and is currently a member of a reserve unit. She responded on the survey “combination of combat and non-combat” regarding her military experience as combat related. Tiana experienced one deployment overseas to Kuwait. She answered on the demographic survey (Appendix D), she did not have a service-connected disability nor was she receiving services for treatment of a service-connected disability. The interview proceeded without incident.

Elsa: “...if it’s gonna help other women veterans who’ve had...there’s quite a few out there ...they should seek help.”

Elsa is a 48-year old American Indian or Alaska Native female who is a full-time junior majoring in Psychology. She currently is taking live courses at a regional campus location of University A. She is an undergraduate transfer from the same state college system and currently receiving military education benefits. Elsa is married and currently

lives off campus. Her spouse is also a veteran. One or both of her parents attended college. Her career goal is to be a state surveyor for rehabilitation centers. Elsa is a veteran of the Air Force Reserves having served 10.5 years. She resigned from the Air Force Reserves with honorable discharge due to being physically incapable to perform assigned duties. Elsa is not in active duty status nor is she currently a member of a reserve unit. She responded “yes” regarding her military experience as combat related. Elsa experienced 5 deployments: Kuwait twice, Maryland, Qatar and United Arab Emirates. She answered that she did have a service-connected disability but was not receiving services for treatment of a service-connected disability. The interview was the only interview that took place off campus and in a public environment. The selection of the interview location was at the request of the participant. The interview proceeded without incident. Elsa was the only study participant who shared she had experienced military sexual trauma, which had not been reported. Elsa was the final interviewee for this study. It was at her suggestion that her pseudonym be “Elsa” which helped lead the researcher to the selection of the other names.

## **4.2 Discussion of the Results**

In this section, the results are presented. This qualitative phenomenological study presents the results using themes. Individual quotations are then used to support these themes. Although themes emerged for each research question, the responses from the interviews varied. The study participants’ experiences were unique, and no two students’ backgrounds were identical. To generalize experiences for women student veterans is not



reasonable. However, upon careful review, initial and secondary analysis of the data, a broad commentary can be presented. The findings presented here capture the essence of this study.

The framework for this study was Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984). In the 4S transition model, four factors (self, situation, support and strategies) provide insight into the transition and the degree of impact a transition will have on an individual (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn, 2010; Goodman et al., 2006). The emergent themes in this study were classified following these four factors. Self-emergent themes are the data which emphasized personal characteristics and psychological resources of the participant. Situation-emergent themes are the data which emphasized the characteristics of events during the transition from the military to college, i.e. role change, duration, previous experience, and timing. Support-emergent themes are the data which put emphasis on the social supports available to the study participant. This included those social supports which were both utilized and not utilized but revealed in the data. Social supports include spouses, family, friends, networks, and options (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984; Goodman et al., 2006). The fourth factor strategies represent the coping responses of the individual as they experience the transition (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984; Goodman et al., 2006). The coping strategy in this study is help-seeking behavior, which is held constant. The data provide information about the direct actions or lack of action of the study participants to seek help. Using this conceptual framework, the data were organized into the formation of six themes. These six themes are:

Theme 1: Military Influence

Theme 2: Transitions

Theme 3: Times of Distress

Theme 4: Tailored Support

Theme 5: Traditional Support

Theme 6: Support “From My Own”

For this research study, there were three guiding questions which focused on the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, a demographic questionnaire, researcher observation and online survey. The data were incorporated into tables, repeatedly analyzed and studied to address the research questions.

Research Question 1: Does the prior military experience of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help?

This question refers to Schlossberg’s factor of ‘Self’, encompassing the variety of characteristics, both personal and demographic, of an individual. The diversity of the participants in this study, in age, ethnicity, years of service and branches served the variety of characteristics added richness to this study, thus the response to research question 1 is equally rich. In response to research question 1 the following theme emerged: Military Influence.

Table 6: Thematic Results in Response to Research Question 1: Does the prior military experiences of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help?

<i>Research Question 1</i>	<i>General Theme Responses from Interview Questions 1, 2, 4, 5</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
Does the prior military experiences of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help?	<i>Pathway to college-4</i> <i>A job; become mature</i> <i>Get away from home town</i> <i>Lifetime goal to join</i> <i>Negative experience-3</i> <i>Positive experience-3</i>	SITUATION Pathways varied; path to college significant
	<i>Separation; medical-3(migraines, migraines, depression, anxiety, &amp; bi-polar)</i> <i>Separation; humanitarian</i>	SELF Medical separation significant
	<i>Sexual harassment</i> <i>Bullying</i> <i>MST-rape</i>	SELF Military Sexual Trauma
	<i>Military experience not viewed as important because it was non-combat</i> <i>Does not feel like a veteran; compares herself to other veterans</i>	SELF Invisibility/uniqueness
	<i>Yes, will seek help-4</i> <i>Still a process-3</i> <i>Still in process of learning to seek help</i> <i>Will try first then seek help</i> <i>Seeking help from faculty-still a challenge</i> <i>Does not seek help-5</i> <i>Bothering someone</i> <i>Trust factor-3</i> <i>Seek help as a last resort-even if physically challenging)</i>	SELF Help-seeking behavior is not strong with this group; trust
	<i>RQ-yes, more mature, personal growth, independent-3</i> <i>RQ-yes, military no one is going to help/pointless to ask for help-3</i> <i>RQ-unsure-2</i> <i>RQ-no without further explanation</i>	RESEARCH QUESTION 1 MILITARY INFLUENCE Yes 6, No 1 and unsure 2
	<i>RQ-Went to men in the military for help and women in - college</i> <i>RQ-Transition/separation from the military increase in help-seeking behavior.</i> <i>RQ-Women in the military have difficulty seeking help.</i>	

## Research Question 1

### Theme 1: Military Influence

Military Influence was the theme that emerged in response to research question 1. This question was: Does the prior military experience of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help? Research Question 1 was the only research question where the participants were asked this question directly in the interview (Appendix C, Interview Question 5) and therefore the final emerging theme speaks directly to this research question. The responses yielded 6 “Yes” responses with half stating that military experience was a negative influence on their help-seeking behavior and the other 3 stating it was a positive influence. One participant responded “No.” Two others were unsure if the military influenced their help-seeking behavior.

Of those responding yes the military was a positive influence were: Tiana, Cindy and Belle. Tiana responded when asked: “I feel like I’m more mature in the decisions that I need to make before I have to ask for help.” Cindy added, “...With the military pushed you more to teach you how to find answers...so I think it’s been beneficial how it was.” Belle confirmed, “I know I feel like the military definitely made me a lot stronger person but was unsure when asked interview question 5. The study participants who believed the military was a negative influence to their help-seeking behavior were: Snow, Aurora, and Merida. Snow remarked, “...and then I came in and I learned really quickly that no one’s gonna help you.”

Merida shared,

“...they just either wanted you to know something like if you asked for help or said you didn’t know how to do something it was like you were dumb and like that was it was just pointless to ask for help...you were gonna get A, either in trouble for it, or like mocked or something so it was like why bother.”

The first theme, Military Influence, is based on direct responses from the study participants. It can therefore be confirmed that the answer to Research Question 1 is: yes, the prior military experience of women student veterans does influence their willingness to seek help. Whether this influence is viewed as weakening the help-seeking behavior cannot be determined. There is one exception from the data that could constitute significance and that was the response from Aurora. Aurora shared when asked about the military influence on her help-seeking behavior:

“When I was active duty in the military, I would not. When I was in the military no, I wouldn’t have asked for help. Because I learned not to trust certain people. It’s been separate from the military that I’ve learned to ask for help.”

This data suggests that the coping strategy of help-seeking was repressed while in the military and only when the situation or transition to college came about, could the help seeking behavior be developed or resurrected.

Both the demographic and interview data demonstrate the variety of military experiences present in this study. Military rank, job, role, years of service, branch, number of deployments, combat exposure, MST exposure and PTSD behaviors varied throughout the data. It is important to mention that exposed in the data, the incentive to join the military was widely viewed as a pathway to college. Evidence from four of the participants acknowledging the path to college supports this thought.

Snow shared, “But, I just kept telling myself the only reason you went into this as a last resort to get to college.” Mulan’s stated “I saw it as full-time job, and I knew they would help me pay for school, so I joined for that reason, to help me get a head on my shoulders to finish school....” Aurora also considered the military as a path to college when she affirmed, “...and then I went into the military because I didn’t have the money for college.”

Research Question 2: What are the events that cause women student veterans to seek help?

This question refers to Schlossberg’s factor of ‘Situation’, this factor encompasses the trigger and timing of the transition, the role change felt by the individual, the duration of the transition, previous experience, concurrent stress that occurs at the transition and assessment of the transition by the individual. The diversity of the participants’ experiences as they transitioned from the military to college is noted. In response to research question 2 the following themes emerged: Transitions and Times of Distress

*Table 7: Thematic Results in Response to Research Question 2 What are the events that cause women student veterans to seek help?*

<i>Research Question 2</i>	<i>General Theme Responses from Interview Questions 3,6,8,9</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
What are the events that cause women student veterans to seek help?	<i>VA transition course – focus on employment/not college-3</i>	SITUATION
	<i>Transition to college was eased due to prior exposure</i>	Transition preparedness for college/exposure
	<i>Foreign language-advising</i>	SOCIAL SUPPORT
	<i>Class schedule-advising</i>	
	<i>Graduate-advising</i>	
	<i>Change of major-advising</i>	
	<i>Faculty/Biology-advising</i>	Advising resources
	<i>Housing/living-4</i>	SOCIAL SUPPORT Housing resources
	<i>New baby/spouse alcoholic</i>	SOCIAL SUPPORT
	<i>Finding a job</i>	
	<i>Dad died/primary caregiver mother w/ Alzheimer's disease</i>	
	<i>Depression; very traumatic experience</i>	

## Research Question 2

There are many events that cause women student veterans to seek help. Two themes, Transitions and Times of Distress, emerged in response to Research Question 2. The Transitions theme captured the transition from the military to college for the study participants. As mentioned above, the timing, role changes, duration of the transition, previous experience, and concurrent factors influence the events that cause women student veterans to seek help. The precipitated transition from military to college varied in the data.

### Theme 2: Transitions

Four women were transitioned under honorable discharge for medical reasons (Snow, Merida, Belle and Elsa), one for humanitarian reasons (Aurora), and the

remaining exited honorably or in the case of Tiana, still serving. Timing for each participant's transition also varied, yet for 5 of the 9 participants, the timing was considered bad. Ariel stated, "...it just ended, and there was not closure so I kind of had, and I joined at 18, so that was all I knew, so I kind of did have a problem with that...." Merida, for instance, delayed her transition to college due to depression. Belle decided to attend only after having been out of the service for several years and was triggered due to employment concerns. Belle shared, "So there was like a long period from when I wasn't in the military until I started school, so I had like not really a transition." Mulan's transition to college provided evidence that previous exposure to college was a factor. Because Mulan had attended college prior to joining the military and then returning after serving, she believed that experience aided her ability to cope with the transition. Mulan responded, "...so I felt like because I had college experience before, it was a lot easier for me."

Transition is a process that extends overtime (Evans et al., 2010). It must therefore be understood that events for women student veterans happen overtime. When a participant is researching colleges, that individual will need to at some point connect with an admissions office. Another time that students rely heavily on resources during transition is at orientation, when they need to confirm coursework for their degree major and register for classes. Study participants also sought advising when they wanted advice on the change of major process, graduate school, and selection of classes that meet GI Bill parameters. There was a general consensus from the study participants that they lacked preparedness with the transition from the military to college.



The role change from being military personnel to civilian was experienced by all but Tiana who is still currently serving. Concurrent stress occurred for several as they transitioned from military to college. Once a student is admitted to a school of choice, housing can become a factor. Such was the case for four of the women student veterans in this study. They were either not residing in the state or living in proximity to the college. In the data, it was expressed that this event was very challenging. Some participants offered that they would have liked additional support from the college with locating off-campus housing. Snow, Ariel, Belle and Tiana all faced challenges with locating housing. Tiana shared, “So it was like a month transition and I didn’t know where I was gonna stay.” Snow offered, “So I live with my cousin right now so I lived with her and she helped me out.” Belle who went through a divorce at the same time of the transition was also challenged with locating housing. Belle stated, “So right after that I went to counseling (referring to divorce) because it was kind of like a mess because I didn’t know where I was gonna live, and like I was starting a brand new school, and it was a week before, like the week before classes started so it was a little rough.” Assistance with locating housing was a finding that was not anticipated; four of the nine women student veterans felt locating housing was a circumstance where help was warranted. Interventions for locating off-campus housing, and providing other resources for living accommodations would benefit this group.

The data suggest this transfer event was assessed by the participants. Many respondents shared the belief the VA was responsible for aiding in transition. Although the support provided by the VA was going to change, once the participant was being

discharged from the military, the aid which was provided at the onset of transition needed improving. Participants shared the VA transition course focused too much on careers, resumes, and employment rather than college. Merida's comment captures the consensus of responses when she stated: "...but they didn't really teach us like how to apply to school or like..." The military and colleges that acknowledge the differences in culture and prepare students for this transition may offer a solution to support that student 'moving out' and 'moving in' (Schlossberg, 1984).

### Theme 3: Times of Distress

The findings for Research Question 2 indicate a second theme of Times of Distress. The Times of Distress are also events that cause women student veterans to seek help. Times of Distress triggers include family crisis, divorce, and mental health concerns. These triggers were viewed as negative and the study participants felt they lacked control. The Times of Distress Theme was interpreted two ways one are those events that study participants felt they should have sought help but did not and those occurrences where actual help was sought. The former interpretation exists from feedback regarding counseling supports and also a reduction of interactions with others when help was needed. Merida shared "Like I was depressed and then instead of going to do something about it I kind of just like was like I'm just gonna be depressed...." Elsa responded "...I felt like during that time, even though it was a bad time, I should've ....help, [but] I also felt like hey I got over it, I've overcome it." Elsa's response regarding not seeking help when help was warranted, was in reference to spousal abuse in her first marriage. Cindy who was exposed to multiple deaths during her time in the

military offered “So Haiti was a real enlightening time for me. So, I probably should have gone and gotten serious counseling. Too much going on.”

The participants who shared their experiences with personal counseling were either supportive or indifferent. Aurora and Belle specifically talked about the events leading to seeking counseling, but both held different perspectives. Aurora believed that counseling was beneficial.

Aurora shared about her experience with counseling,

“...and it was supposed to be a family in-home family short term type thing...and then it ended up being just me. That was my first ever really counseling experience. What that did was teach me how to do self-care. It taught me boundaries and things like that. So I learned a lot from that.”

Belle responded, “I don’t know how...I didn’t feel like it was very helpful for me.”

The data present that in Times of Distress will also cause a woman student veteran to seek help and this should also be considered when addressing support services during transition.

### **Research Question 3**

This question refers to Schlossberg’s factor of ‘Support’, this factor encompasses three facets of supports: type, function and measurement. In response to research question 2 the following themes emerged: Tailored Support, Traditional Support and Support From My Own.

*Table 8: Thematic Results in Response to Research Question 3 What are the resources that women student veterans utilize?*

<i>Research Question 3</i>	<i>General Theme Responses from Interview Questions 7,10,11,12,13</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
What are the resources that women student veterans utilize?	Self “Success”-3 Support system identified-5 Lack of support/no identifiable supports-3	SELF Feels separate than male veterans and non-veterans ‘Separateness’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age Is a barrier-2</li> <li>• Women veterans are invisible</li> </ul>
	VSS positive resource-4 Little interaction with VSS-3 VSS & VA positive resources Resource must care Location of VSS is a factor; convenience Veterans on campus have a stronger voice Gender differences Target programming for women i.e. childcare, birth control-2	SOCIAL SUPPORT Improved Services
	Minimal interaction with faculty-3 Minimal interaction with peers	SOCIAL SUPPORT Faculty interactions/learning environments
	No intentional outreach to other veterans-5 SVA negative experience-3 Works at VSS Yes, intentional outreach (social media)	SOCIAL SUPPORT Veteran Connections--Connect veteran students intentionally; improve SVA
	Interested in connecting with other women veterans-3 No interest in connecting with other women veterans-1	SITUATION Convenience Time and effort involved in connecting is a concern

### Research Question 3

This research question allows for a broad range of answers regarding the resources that student veterans utilize. Three themes which emerged in response to Research Question 3 were described as ‘supports.’ Supports identify who will help or

hinder an individual (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984). The three 'support' themes are: Tailored Support, Traditional Support and Support From My Own.

#### Theme 4: Tailored Support

The Tailored Support theme was identified because this type of support is institutional. There are on many college campuses dedicated services for veterans as was the case at University A. In the findings participants had varying degrees of interaction with resources on campus but most were exposed to the veteran student service (VSS) center on campus. Three participants reported that they had little interaction. One student, Cindy, did not find the VSS to be a valued resource. Cindy recognized the VSS as a poor resource when she said, "Yeah, find it is what I need to do and who I need to talk to before I go in and waste my time with the VSS." She was the only graduate student in the study and this experience can be attributed to her perception. One student, Elsa, had not had any interaction with the VSS. She confirmed this was likely due to her location on a regional campus.

Four of the women who had interacted with the VSS viewed this resource positively. Most could identify a staff person by name who was a valued resource. Snow reported: "I settled on [University A] because...she answered my question, emailed me back...she was super helpful" and "They're a lot more, I guess, friendly about it and accepting of the need for help." Ariel believed the VSS peer mentor was a valuable resource and found her helpful. "...and their peer mentor is a good resource..." She also mentioned another individual: "Especially...he's very helpful." During the transition to college she also expressed her intentional pursuit of help from the VSS.

Ariel shared, “I went straight to the VSS and they helped me with all my questions. I went to orientation and started out there, so they let us know of all the programs.” One student, Mulan, was employed by the VSS office. She expressed her desire to be more involved especially with other women veterans. She stated, “I wish I was in the front so I could. So, the people who come in I can you know, especially with females”. The conditions for seeking help varied for each participant, although of the top utilized services, certifying military educational benefits and peer/professional academic advising were the top two circumstances for seeking help. Many of the participants had suggestions for improved services in the VSS. These recommendations are included in Chapter 5 Recommendations. These recommendations should be taken into consideration to improve this ‘social support’ for women student veterans as they transition to college.

#### Theme 5: Traditional Support

The Traditional Support theme which emerged in response to Research Question 3 encompasses the faculty, staff and peer supports. These traditional supports are types of institutional supports. This theme emerged out of responses by several participants who revealed their lack of connectedness to faculty. Mulan, a biology major, had no interaction with her instructors. She replied, “I don’t even talk to my instructors.” Elsa struggled with interacting with faculty within the classroom, “I feel like maybe it’s a wrong question....” Though these students expressed difficulty going to faculty for help, Snow was comfortable with this situation. She shared in her interview about a time when she went to her professor for help: “...but I wanted to talk to my professor and get her help....” Cindy, the only graduate student, did share that the coordinator for her program

helped her to get into the program under provisional status. This was viewed by her as great resource. Ultimately, the data did not reveal any one student having a strong relationship with faculty.

#### Theme 6: Support From My Own

Support From My Own is the final ‘Social Support’ theme for Research Question 3. This theme of connecting veterans was found after data analysis and may be the most challenging social support to address. Two interview questions (12 and 13 in Appendix C) were developed by the researcher to gauge the level of interest by the study participant to connect with: (1) other student veterans and (2) women student veterans and faculty. The responses varied from enthusiastic interest in connecting with other veterans to disinterest. The data describe different types of supports available and experienced within the student veteran community. Participants were encouraged to provide their opinions about connecting with other veterans.

Mulan stated, “I would love to [reach] out to other veterans.”

She added,

“I don’t know what the word for is when you know you’re proud of someone, you know someone has the same background as you, just to be in the same branch as you...she’s not just another female or another chick you know, there’s something to talk about.”

Mulan, the one student who worked in the VSS also commented on her role in that office and how she could connect with other women student veterans. She responded, “I wish I was in the front so I could. So the people who do come in I can, you know, especially with females.” In addition Snow was equally enthusiastic when she acknowledged,

“I want to meet more vets, especially Navy vets, because it doesn’t seem like there’s a whole lot in this area.” Regarding connecting to women veterans, Snow replied, “So yea I would love to meet another woman. I [want to] see if their experiences are similar to mine, I [want to] see if they were treated the same as me, I [want to] see if they had better experiences than me. I want to be able to support them and I would love them supporting me.”

Tianna shared, “It would be really nice to have other veteran friends especially if they were females...bounce information off of when things are going on.” These participants exhibited a high level of interest in connecting with both men and women veterans.

Merida’s responses were conflicting, when asked about connecting with other veterans she replied, “...I don’t know like what the problem is I just don’t feel like I compare to them so I just try to stay away.” Yet when it came to connecting with women student veterans her perspective shifted to a reply, “I would really like that.” Cindy, Belle, and Elsa had not connected with other veteran students. Cindy expressed that she had not taken any steps to connect with other veterans: “No, I don’t even know how to go find them.” Aurora also expressed disinterest in connecting with other women: “...I never felt the need to connect that way.” Neither Belle nor Elsa exhibited interest in connecting with other veterans or women student veterans, although Belle did share a good experience at the state college from which she transferred. Belle replied, “I did socialize with them somewhat and it was a lot easier talking to them than other students because you feel like they understand you a little bit better and so you have something in common....” These responses emphasize the different perceptions of connecting with other veterans. The challenge thus is how to connect those students who may have an interest and get others interested in connecting. For Cindy, Belle and Elsa, there may be



creative ways developed to get them interested in connecting as well as other women student veterans at University A who may have this same perception.

A key facet of 'Support' according to Schlossberg (1981, 1984) is measurement. In this study time and effort in seeking help was a factor. The emerging theme Support From My Own identified convenience, time, and effort as hindrances to study participants' interactions with on campus services and engagement with other veterans. Ariel, who has a one year old baby at home, voiced her concerns with connecting: "...so yeah I would love to but I think my life right now it's be kind of crazy to connect, I'm starting to come to terms with that" "...so I've never really tried much past—and I got a daughter and a husband too so it's especially hard..." Although Aurora expressed interest in connecting with other veterans, location of VSS and convenience were a factors. Her response to interview question 13 included, "So it's always been a place that I've always intentionally wanted to go, but because of its location...if it was at the student union, I'd be at the VSS every week, but because the VSS is so far away..." "...And "So not going and not being involved is more out of convenience, not so much desire." Tiana added, "I feel like I just have a lot going on to actually like try to make the effort to find more friends to do things..." Convenience may hinder programming specifically designed to connect women student veterans to other veterans. If programming and opportunities to connect are seen as work or challenging, little if any interaction will take place.

Barriers were identified in seeking support. First, age difference was the first barrier. Snow, Cindy, Mulan, and Elsa each explained their perception of separateness

based on their age difference from other students. For example, Cindy replied, “Yeah, I say that, coming from the military retired.... I met so many road blocks. People that were—I really want to say intolerant of older people.” Mulan stated, “...it’s nice to have that group of friends you work with who are also veterans, and also who are older.” Additionally, Elsa admitted, “I think the more the issue was you know I felt like am I too old?” Elsa also responded, “...and I think I had an issue talking with the younger generation the most.” Age was one factor which fell under this theme of Support From My Own. This could be explained by the study participants ages with the youngest at 20 and average age between participants being 36. Most served immediately after high school and are just now attending college.

A second factor which falls under this emerging theme of is the psychological idea of invisibility. The exposure to this idea stems from the many participant accounts of differences in gender for military personal, lack of acknowledgements by society and college services that women are veterans, and their own psychological thought of not being a veteran. Most of the women student veterans in this study believe they do not get the same acknowledgments for serving in the military. Several responded they feel their service was not valuable. The following comments capture the essence of this idea of separateness.

Snow: “No one expects you to be one,” “No one expects a woman to be a veteran,” “I feel like I have to over-compensate because you don’t think of me the way you would think of a man...”

Mulan: “When people ask me about my serving experience, I always get ashamed,” “Really compared to the guys that I have served with who’s been through so much, I can’t...-I feel like I can’t even say I served in the military,”

Ariel: “I was a veteran, but some of the assumption of thinking I am a dependent is a little annoying, you know. Like, no, I was in the military,” “It’s like oh yeah she’s probably just a dependent,” “No, because I don’t feel veteran enough like at all.”

Gender differences were a continuous factor also when seeing help. Ariel replied, “...maybe if there was just someone to go specifically for women, because I’m sure like a lot of women have questions...and women coming out of the military probably have different questions than men, and maybe if there’s just like someone to be like oh yeah like we have different resources that we need....” Cindy, a veteran of 21 years in the U.S. Air Force, answered, “I think we think different. And we’re in a different situation. When men come to college, kids are second, wife is third. If they don’t have either, it’s even better. Whereas most women that are coming back to college, kids are first.”

The findings reported here capture themes developed from the data. There are 6 themes identified from the data. One theme emerged for Research Question 1. Two themes emerged for Research Question 2, and 3 themes emerged for Research Question 3. The themes for Research Question 1 provide: yes, the military does influence the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. The themes for Research Question 2 provide: various events cause women student veterans these themes were Transitions and Times of Distress. The 3 themes for Research Question 3 provide: the resources that women student veterans utilize include: Tailored Support, Traditional Support and

Support From My Own. The Veteran Student Services Center on the main campus was a key resource for many of the participants, though programming focused on women needs and services was a factor in utilizing this social support. Interaction with faculty was seen as not a utilized resource for this group of students. Connecting with other veterans, although not a large social support based on participant responses, there was interest shown by several of the study participants to connect with other veterans, in particular other women veterans. In conclusion the results presented allow for a better understanding of the individual characteristics, experiences, and social supports for women student veterans. The strategy of help-seeking behavior can be interpreted based on the data provided. Help-seeking behavior for these women is modified based on the situation, i.e., interacting with faculty vs. VSS. Women student veterans coping with the transition from the military do seek help for information seeking and take direct action when certifying benefits. The help-seeking behavior, however, shifts or is inhibited in other instances such as getting academic advising support and connecting with other veterans.

#### **4.3 Strength of the Study**

All research should provide credible and valid information. Ensuring validity in qualitative research requires the research to be conducted in an ethical manner (Creswell, 2013). To provide validity to this study, the researcher collected additional data from an online survey. The online survey as described in Chapter 3 allowed participants to respond to a questionnaire, a combination of the demographic and interview questions.

Eight women student veterans participated in the online survey. The responses of the online survey are in Appendix E. In response to the interview questions the participants shared for interview question 1 that this question was a bit vague and was not sure what the question was asking. Joining the military as a path to college had several responses which matched the responses for the participants in this study. Online survey responses included “This has always been my plan, it was to go to college I just needed benefits for college,” and “I wanted to take advantage of the post 911 bill and honestly just wanted to get my associates degree to start in a direction towards a career.” One response which from the online survey described disdain for the military and challenges with transitioning, “I’m glad to get away from everything military...but the transition wasn’t all easy. I’m still jumpy and the only therapy that I get for PTSD/anxiety is by completely avoiding anything that might trigger me.” Five of the eight respondents shared their experience as difficult when transitioning from the military to college. The following are some of the responses to provide an illustration:

- “When I have had to be on campus its’ very overwhelming for me and I do not enjoy it.”
- “It has been difficult to struggle because the military expects their priorities to be out first which doesn’t always balance out with school.”
- “The first few months of applying and getting transcripts was difficult.”
- “...the only thing that I found difficult was trying to sign up at the VA... for health benefits.”

The data from the online survey validated the findings from this study for research question 1: Does the military experience influence the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. Seven of the eight online participants reported “yes” they believed the military influenced their help-seeking behavior. One student did not respond to this question. The participants describe the military tendency to not ask for help and going through a chain of command as a key cultural difference between the military and college. Answers were transparent:

“I think my military experience probably has affected my decision to ask for help. In the military, you depend on your fellow airman and soldiers it is hard not to do the same thing in the civilian world,”

Additionally: “Where I was stationed, there were a bunch of sarcastic leaders to it was kind of difficult to ask for help.” One student in particular struggled with connecting to other men, due to MST experience: “Yes. I am not quick to go into a male’s office or anywhere alone with a man. I prefer email or telephone and I’m much more willing to get help from a female.”

Data from the online survey complemented Research Question 2 findings. The findings provided in the study found 2 themes: Transitions and Times of Distress. These two themes were recovered from the online survey. Online responses harmonized with identification of support staff in the VSS, seeking academic advising services for testing accommodations, and seeking help for personal counseling services. One response in particular supports this theme,

“Degree planning and I have yet to ask for help about graduate programs. There are too many departments and people at the university and I get overwhelmed and do not know where to go or call or who to ask for help.”

Yet, three of the eight responses stated that getting military benefits certified was the primary reason for seeking help. No students identified seeking housing as a cause to seek help.

Validation of the findings from Research Question 3 was also provided from online survey responses. The findings for Research Question 3 identified 3 themes. These themes were: Tailored Support, Traditional Support and Support From My Own. One student did not identify any social supports whether it was to share experiences or be successful in college. Her responses were, “Unfortunately, I bottle it up,” and “I can’t think of a single person.” Regarding connecting with other student veterans all but one student responded that she had taken steps to connect with other student veterans. Two students validated the idea of ‘separateness’ in the findings when they shared, “Not really, majority still hold a stigma towards females who are also veterans,” and “Not really, I haven’t heard of any groups that get together in my area. I kind of don’t feel like I belong either because I didn’t do much at the hospital but paperwork. I also never deployed or did any tours like other veterans so I feel like there is no need for me there.” Only one of 7 responses reported interest in connecting with other women veterans. She stated,

“Yes! It would not only be more comfortable, but being from an organization that consisted of mostly men, a female would be a nice to not only talk to but they would understand the sacrifice and the harassment we dealt with.”

To validate the emergent themes and findings, the researcher added an online survey to the methods of data collection for this study. This process of utilizing an additional data

set encourages thoroughness of the data analysis. The intent was to seek any patterns in relation to the research questions that corroborated or contradicted the findings.

#### **4.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter reexamined the conceptual framework for this study as it related to the findings and themes from the research participants. Following meticulous analyses, the researcher revealed 6 emergent themes regarding women student veterans' help-seeking behaviors. The subsequent 6 themes were used to support the dialogue and associations concerning the three research questions. From those themes, numerous discoveries and recommendations were generated for practice and future research. Chapter Five of this study is devoted to the discussion of the overview of the study, limitations to the research, and recommendations for future practice and research.



## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Overview of the Study**

Help-seeking behavior is a critical aspect in overall student success. Therefore, determining the multiple characteristics of this population of students, the situations they face as they transition from the military to college, and ways in which they go about seeking help from available resources intentionally is equally critical (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Karabenick, 2001; Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). The purpose of this study was to explore the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. In addition, the events that caused them to seek help and the resources they utilized are described. The three research questions were: (1) Does the prior military experience of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help? (2) What are the events that cause women student veterans to seek help? (3) What are the resources that women student veterans utilize? Incorporating a qualitative phenomenological approach the data were collected via face to face interviews with nine women student veterans. An additional data set was collected via an online survey. The survey responses were used to authentic the data from the in-person interviews. Smith, et al., (2009) recommend having the additional data set from the online survey helps test and develop the plausibility of the interpretation. The data were organized using Smith et al's., (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The purpose of IPA is to classify emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009).

Research posits that women student veterans are less likely to seek help from resources available to them at a lower rate than civilian students and their male

counterparts (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Sander, 2012).

Numerous challenges and strategies experienced by women student veterans were highlighted previously in Chapter Two: Review of the Literature. The existing research indicates the importance of understanding the needs and expectations of women student veterans in transition from the military to college. These transitions are events or nonevents which result in changes to an individual's relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Schlossberg, 1984). In this investigation, the experiences of women student veterans and their help-seeking behavior as a strategy were explored. Though the literature was replete with obstacles for this population, limited research exists on the topic of help-seeking. The researcher deemed it necessary to investigate this topic because of the limited amount of research on women student veterans, specifically their help-seeking behaviors. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. In addition, the events that caused them to seek help and the resources they utilized are described. Thus, the primary focus of this study was examining the meaning of transition for women student veterans. Also, to determine from whom and under what circumstances do they (women student veterans) seek help. Furthermore, this research study was developed to broaden the knowledge about this unique population of college students, their military experiences, and their own perceptions of resources available to them. The research questions of this study are:

1. Does the prior military experience of women student veterans influence their willingness to seek help?

2. What are the events that cause women student veterans to seek help?
3. What are the resources that women student veterans utilize?

The intention of this research study was to gain insight into the reasons and explanations for certain behaviors and patterns; in this case help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans, and thus a qualitative methodology was employed. The phenomenological approach for this qualitative study was designed to investigate the phenomenon of help-seeking behavior in women student veterans during their transition. The researcher sought to focus on the experiences of women student veterans and analyze the events and occurrences of these shared experiences. The qualitative research methods employed in this study were in-person interviews and online-survey. Goodman et al. (2006) stressed the role of perception in transitions, noting that a transition exists only if it is so defined by the individual experiencing it. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The analysis of responses followed a six-step process (Smith et al., 2009):

1. Reading and re-reading
2. Initial noting
3. Developing emergent themes
4. Searching for connections across emergent themes
5. Moving to the next case
6. Looking for patterns across cases

An initial analysis was run to develop factors from each interview question based on individual responses. The secondary analysis was run to demonstrate the similarities

among the responses of the eight participants and highlight emergent themes. These themes are categorized by general and emerging. This applied dissertation has significance and importance in assisting colleges and universities in determining the challenges, needs, and recommendations of women student veterans. Due to the constricted exploration on women student veterans, more research should be performed to stress the importance of how women student veterans experience their military service, their transition from the military to college, and ultimately their success in college. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. In addition, the events that caused them to seek help and the resources they utilized are described. The researcher's chief focus was to collect themes centered on the perspectives and experiences of help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. Further, the researcher sought to pronounce the personal challenges and successes of women student veterans which can lead to future implementation of university support services specifically designed for this unique population of students.

## **5.2 Limitations**

Limitations to research are largely deemed outside the control of the researcher; nevertheless, they should be documented (Eames, 2014). The researcher has acknowledged a small number of limitations that could have been posed during this investigation that may have influenced the results of the research study. Because the researcher is a student services professional at the same University A, the potential for unintentional bias could have affected the outcomes of the data. The researcher did utilize

the method of bracketing; nevertheless, this does not give the assurance that bias was not present in the investigation of the results.

Next, the observations rendered from the target population were based on the results of the relatively small sample population of nine women student veterans at only one university. The limited quantity of participants cannot yield generalizations to the entire women student veteran population. Although there was a small sample size, the population for this study generated high diversity both ethnically, age, branch, years of service, and degree major. Additionally, as noted in the literature review, women student veterans tend to shield themselves from seeking help, which could have led to not disclosing of experiences either in the military or in college. The researcher had no control to ensure that participants would participate in a meaningful way, which would provide useful information to the study. The interview questions were developed by the researcher and may have been confusing to the study participants; this was evidenced in responses to interview question 1 of the online survey participants. The researcher neglected to ask every interview question of every participant, as the conversation was to be participant-directed. Missing responses to interview questions may have withheld essential information that could have assisted in the results of the analysis. Further, the methods utilized at the location site may not be illustrative of other universities that have an unlike collection of women student veterans. Finally, as with all qualitative research, these findings cannot be universal beyond the conditions the study examined.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Based on the outcomes of this study, there are numerous suggestions. These suggestions are presented with the goal of informing college administrators, student affairs professionals, and Veteran Affairs constituents on the experiences of women student veterans and their help-seeking behavior. This study is providing a template for institutions to begin its discussions with their own women student veterans. By utilizing student declarations, investigations such as this offer key evidence that paves the way to help campuses in refining and progressing assistance for women student veterans.

A primary recommendation involves universities revisiting their transfer, transition, and veteran student services and identify gaps in services for women student veterans. This includes the university and key stakeholders, including the students themselves being brought together to collaborate on aspirations for services and best means of delivering those services. By collecting information about their perceptions of existing services institutions will be able to establish a portfolio of services. This strategic planning will need to also have measures in place that assess continued changing needs of women student veterans, including human resources and financial support for space and other operations.

This environmental scan should be done annually to improve service delivery and efficiency. Because the number of women veteran students entering college continues to escalate every year, it is vital that institutions recognize them and afford further resources to aid them throughout their college years. Veteran programs for women student veterans should be increased and incorporate the factors that students view as important.

Recommendations for the VSS and University A include:

- Having staff be more welcoming; recognize individuals when they come in and allow veterans to sit and hang out without being asked if they need help multiple times
- Staff be more informed about women veterans on campus/not all dependents
- VSS offer study exam test taking; practice testing to do better on real exams
- VSS offer programming specifically geared towards women student veterans
- VSS offer programming focused on ways veterans can deal with stress
- VSS be an advocate for students in pending status, course substitution issues etc.
- Have a dedicated staff person to work with women issues i.e. birth control
- Provide pamphlet brochure checklist to follow designed for women students
- Offer more resources for housing
- Move the VSS to central location on campus such as a student union
- Have a dedicated staff person who works on programming; engagement activities for both single and veterans with families and workshops of interest 'coffee hour'.  
This person would also be involved with the SVA on campus as advisor
- Identify ways to get faculty/student learning communities to connect women veterans with faculty in their degree program

Veteran centers on campus are created precisely to assist veteran students in their transition and acclimation to college, and the institution should consider any means to aid these students with a successful transition (Eames, 2014). It is the desire of the

researcher that colleges and universities use this research as a tool when constructing programming regarding women student veterans.

Another recommendation includes having the VA adjust its transition course. The transition process was deemed challenging for many due to a lack of knowledge about the college process. The recommendation includes that the VA offer courses either in more detail with existing courses or separate and which are college focused. These courses could assist students with application, transcript, health immunization, and financial aid processes. This approach will also allow women student veterans to be successful and build a foundation to be part of the overall university community.

The final recommendation is that research should be completed on the needs of women student veterans. Research concentrating on approaches to enhance and increase engagement of women student veterans would assist administrators of institutions in developing, scheduling, and financing women student veteran centered activities and programming. This investigation and future research will benefit colleges and universities by informing them of the nature of the problems that women student veterans face, but also how they go about seeking help. Institutions can then provide appropriate services and resources to assist women student veterans in achieving their goals. By increasing the knowledge of the women student veteran population at the university, the students will be better served.

This study was conducted on a large university campus. With the diversity of students at University A, a replication of the study at another university is suggested to confirm these findings and to make broad conclusions. A potential study comparing the



outcomes would verify the likeness and reveal any dissimilarities unearthed in other research studies. Other universities and colleges could duplicate this study on women student veterans, because each women student veteran population might vary from the participants for this study. This would offer additional knowledge into the characteristics of women student veterans and help identify strategies to support them.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

At the rate of women student veterans going to college during or after being in the military, it is imperative to determine how these transitions are being perceived. To meet the needs and expectations of women student veterans, an examination of the different transition events is an important first step. This study sought to facilitate a discussion about the factors that influence these transitions, with a lens directed at their help-seeking behavior as a coping tool. The transition process has been approached from a phenomenological perspective by gathering experiences via in-person interviews. The study was framed using Schlossberg's Adult Transition Theory (1981, 1984). This framework facilitates and understanding of adults in transition and aids them in connecting to the help they need to cope with the "ordinary and extraordinary process of living" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. vii)

In this study, women student veterans' perceptions were sought regarding their own help-seeking behaviors. The qualitative design of the study allowed for nine women student veterans to share their experience in the military, transition to college, and experiences as a student. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the

help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans. In addition, the events that caused them to seek help and the resources they utilized are described. It has been disclosed in this study that women student veterans have varying reasons for seeking help and when they do it is typically done to seek information or obtain a key service, i.e. academic advising. Universities are being held to a high standard of graduating the greatest number of students possible and producing high graduation rates. The more university administrators understand women student veterans' needs, approach to, and expectations of services, the further institutions can help those students accomplish academic success.

New programming can supply women student veterans with resources to transition with positive outcomes. Encouraging help-seeking behaviors during these transitions leads to academic success (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). There are obstacles that women student veterans face as they transition out of the military into civilian life (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Vacchi, 2012). In the scenarios of this study, student transitions from being a non-student in many cases to becoming a full-time student. Although these transitions vary by individual and beyond university programming, women student veteran programming affords these students a holistic approach to assimilation into the university life socially, scholarly, and personally. Therefore, determining the multiple characteristics of this population of students, the situations they face as students, and ways in which they go about seeking help from available resources intentionally is equally critical.

This investigation can be to assist in the discovery of activities, forces, and contexts that influence, enable, or constrain the development of help-seeking behavior in

women student veterans. Being in the military as a woman can have an impact, whether it be physical, emotional, or psychological, or a combination of these. The dominant masculine perspective imbedded in the military can only serve to direct the perceptions of the women student veterans who served within this environment, many beyond five years. The women student veterans' natural tendencies are also considered, and if by nature the individuals do not seek help regularly, this may continue when they transition and change their role to student. The phenomenon of help-seeking behavior for women student veterans must be considered during the multiple transitions occurring for that individual. These transitions can include from service member to civilian to student.

The characteristics of the participants of this study showcase the diversity of the women student veterans at University A, yet this is only a snapshot of the larger population. An individualized format of services may be an unrealistic expectation but the main themes and conclusions presented in this research opens the discussion further. The results of this research satisfy the research questions and provide some new outcomes to the current research on women student veterans and their help-seeking behavior. Finally, the recommendations to the university community will help establish best practices and benchmarks to serve the women student veteran population. This formative assessment described the experiences of women student veterans and how their help-seeking behaviors impact their success in college. The researcher encourages university administrators to use the results of this study to make sound decisions regarding what steps and resources to include in its services for its women student veterans.

## **APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTERS**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**  
**FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Tanya Armstrong**

Date: **March 15, 2016**

Dear Researcher:

On 03/15/2016, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	AN INVESTIGATION OF THE HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR OF WOMEN STUDENT VETERANS
Investigator:	Tanya Armstrong
IRB Number:	SBE-16-12098
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Muratori".

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 03/15/2016 09:26:22 AM EDT

IRB Manager



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**  
**FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Tanya Armstrong**

Date: **September 06, 2016**

Dear Researcher:

On 09/06/2016, the IRB approved the following minor modifications as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Modification Type:	Change from an interview to a survey to be conducted online, updated consent and protocol and change in the questionnaire.
Project Title:	AN INVESTIGATION OF THE HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR OF WOMEN STUDENT VETERANS
Investigator:	Tanya Armstrong
IRB Number:	SBE-16-12098
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Kamille Chaparro on 09/06/2016 05:15:20 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

## **APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM**

# **AN INVESTIGATION OF THE HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIORS OF WOMEN STUDENT VETERANS**

## **Informed Consent**

**Principal Investigator:** Tanya Armstrong, MA

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Thomas D. Cox, Ed.D, MA

### **Investigational Sites:**

- N/A

### **Introduction:**

Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) study many topics. To do this we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. You are being invited to take part in a research study which include women who are UCF students with military experience.

You have been asked to take part in this research study because you represent the sample of students warranted for this study. You must be 18 years of age or older to be included in the research study.

The person doing this research is Tanya Armstrong of the Department of Child, Family and Community Sciences in the College of Education and Human Performance at UCF. Because the researcher is a graduate student she is being guided by Dr. Thomas D. Cox, a UCF faculty advisor in the Department of Child, Family and Community Sciences.

### **What you should know about the research study:**

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- A research study is something you volunteer for.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You should take part in this study only because you want to.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

### **Purpose of the research study:**

The purpose of this study is to explore the help-seeking behaviors of women student veterans and determine from whom and under what circumstances they seek out help.

### **What you will be asked to do in the study:**



The processes for this research study requires either a face to face interview or completion of an online survey.

The face to face interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes, in a location co-determined by participant and researcher. Face to face study participants will be asked to complete a 17 question demographic survey at the beginning of the interview session. This will be followed by question and answer session between participant and researcher. Face to face interview design allows participant to share sensitive information not likely shared in an online survey.

For the online survey participants will be asked to complete an online Qualtrics survey consisting of 30 questions with 17 of them being demographic and the remaining 13 open ended questions. Participants are encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences in depth on the open ended question portion of the survey. The survey is designed to allow study participants to reflect at length on their individual experiences. The survey is designed to allow study participants to save and return to the survey should there be a need.

**Location:**

Face to face interviews will be determined by participant and researcher.

The survey will be e-mail by invitation to the selected sample population, therefore the location is virtual.

**Time required:**

There are only expectations on length of time for the demographic portion of the survey which is approximately 3-5 minutes.

**Audio or video taping:**

Face to face interviews will be audio recorded.

**Risks:**

The reasonable foreseeable risks and discomforts involved in taking part in this study are related to the interview questions. In your responses to the interview questions you may recall experiences of feeling embarrassed, humiliated, loss of confidence, or emotional trauma. I have contact information provided here should you wish to connect any of these offices after completing the survey.

- UCF Counseling and Psychological Services (407) 823-2811 or <http://caps.sdes.ucf.edu/>
- UCF Victim Services-Call 24/7 @ (407) 823-1200 or <http://victimservices.ucf.edu/>

- UCF Office of Veterans Services (407) 823-2707 or <http://varc.sdes.ucf.edu/>

**Benefits:**

I cannot promise benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, a possible benefit includes learning more about the research process.

**Compensation or payment:**

Face to face interviewees will receive a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card.

**Confidentiality:**

I will limit your personal data collected in this study to people who have a need to review this information. I cannot promise complete secrecy. There are limitations on confidentiality based on any possible legal issues. Any reports of abuse, neglect etc. may be disclosed to appropriate authorities per Federal and Florida Laws.

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to:

Tanya Armstrong, Graduate Student, Educational Leadership Program, College of Education and Human Performance, (352) 978-8389 email at [Tanya.Armstrong@ucf.edu](mailto:Tanya.Armstrong@ucf.edu)

or

Dr. Thomas D. Cox, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Child, Family and Community Sciences at (901) 387-8361 or by email at [Thomas.Cox@ucf.edu](mailto:Thomas.Cox@ucf.edu).

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:**

Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901. You may also talk to them for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

**Withdrawing from the study:**

You may withdraw from the study before the collection of the data is complete and your data will be destroyed.

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS**

1. Please share what have been your military experiences prior to coming to college.
2. Tell me why did you decide to go to college?
3. Please share what your experience has been as you transition from the military to college.
4. Are you typically someone who asks for assistance when you find you need it?
5. Do you believe your military experience has affected how you go about asking for help? Why or why not?
6. What is your impression of the services offered by the VA compared to the university's services?
7. When transitioning to college from the military from what services did you seek assistance? And what services did you receive?
8. Please describe the issues or concerns for which you have sought help.
9. Can you tell me about a time when you didn't seek help but should have?
10. Who do you get together with for support and to share information and experiences?
11. Whom do you consider to be sources of support for you to be successful in college?
12. Have you taken steps take to connect with other student veterans? Why or why not?
13. Do you have a need to find and connect with other women veteran students and/or faculty to share information and experiences? Why or why not?

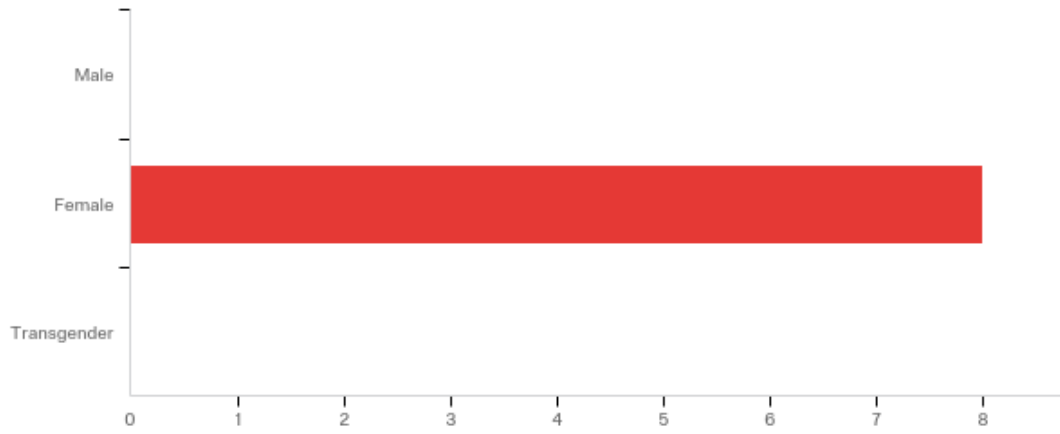
## **APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY QUESTIONS**

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your academic standing?
3. What is your college experience?
4. Did either of your parents attend college?
5. What are your living arrangements?
6. What is your enrollment this semester?
7. What is your degree major(s)? Please list all majors
8. Are you currently a recipient of any military education benefits (ex. GI Bill)?
9. What year were you born? Please list actual year, month and day are not required.
10. What is your race? (You may select more than one option)
11. Are you currently on active duty?
12. Are you currently a member of a reserve unit?
13. Which branch (es) of the armed forces do/did you belong to? Please include all branches you serve (d) in.
14. How many years of military experience do you have? Please include all years combined.
15. Would you consider your experiences in the military to be combat related?
16. Do you have a service-connected disability?
17. Are you receiving any services for treatment of a service-connected disability?  
  
These can include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Military Sexual Trauma, or Traumatic Brain Injury.

## **APPENDIX E: ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS**

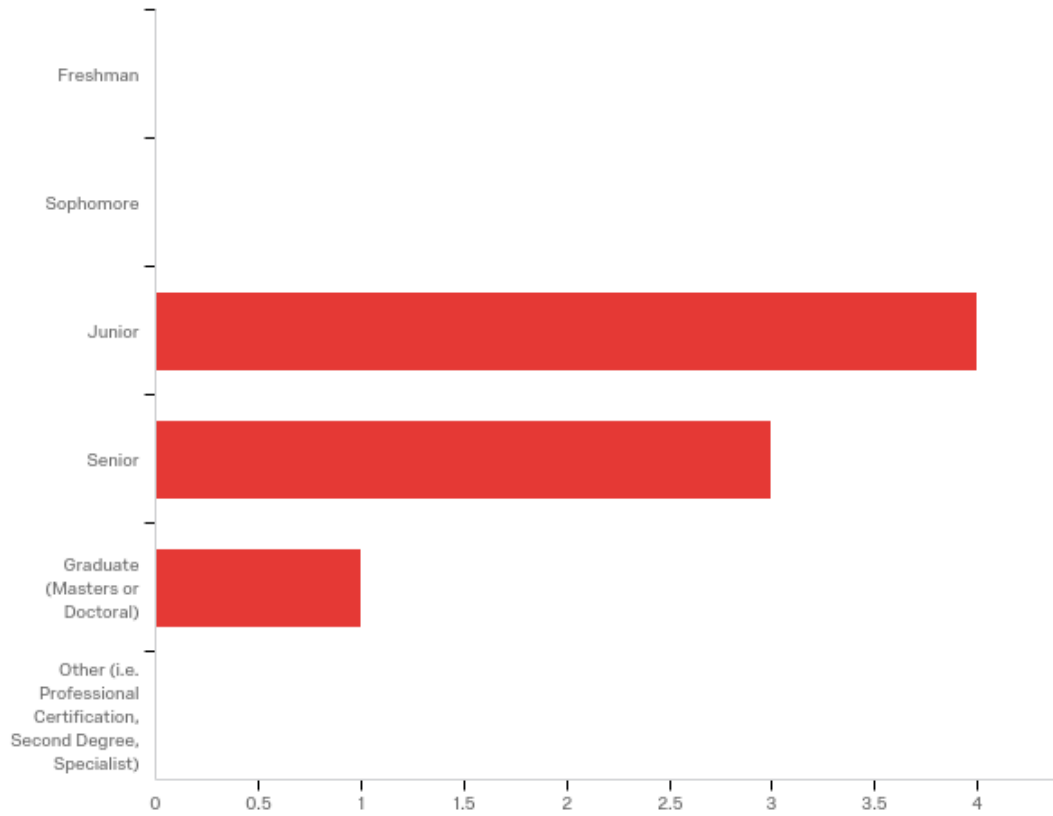


### Q1 - What is your gender?



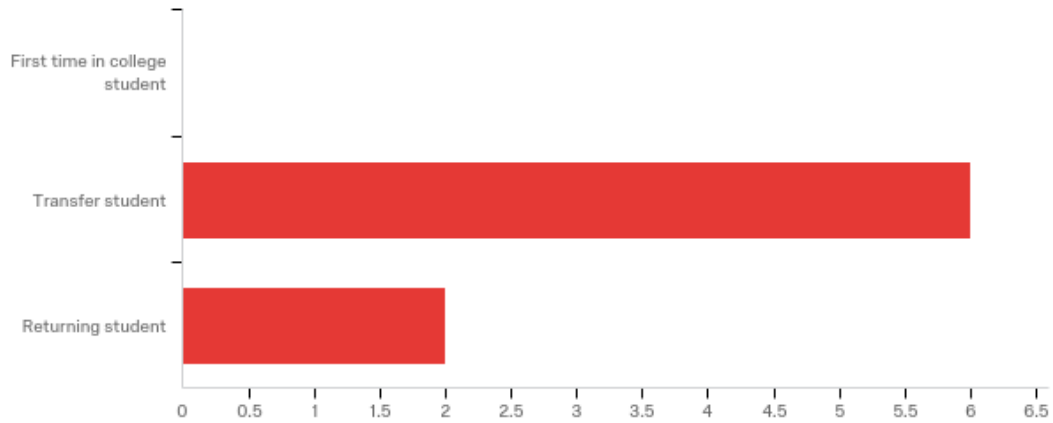
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Male	0.00%	0
2	Female	100.00%	8
3	Transgender	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	8

## Q2 - What is your student classification/academic standing?



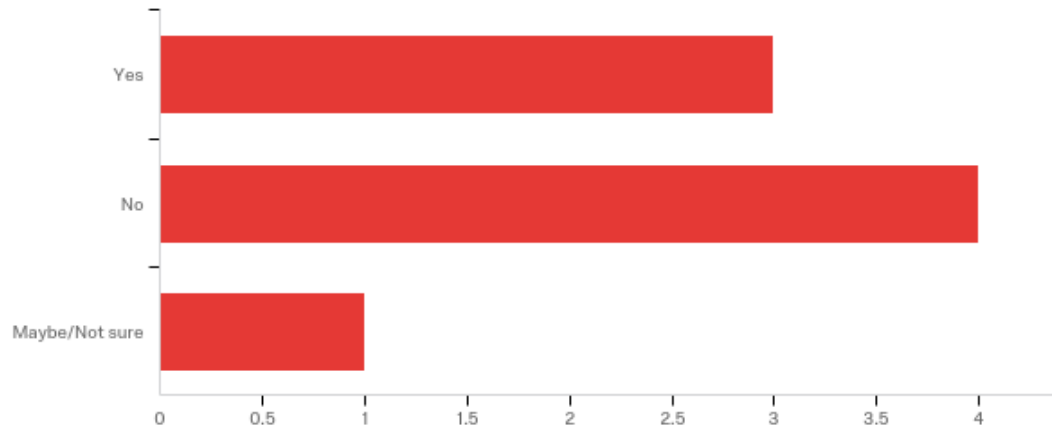
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Freshman	0.00%	0
2	Sophomore	0.00%	0
3	Junior	50.00%	4
4	Senior	37.50%	3
5	Graduate (Masters or Doctoral)	12.50%	1
6	Other (i.e. Professional Certification, Second Degree, Specialist)	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	8

### Q3 - What is your college experience?



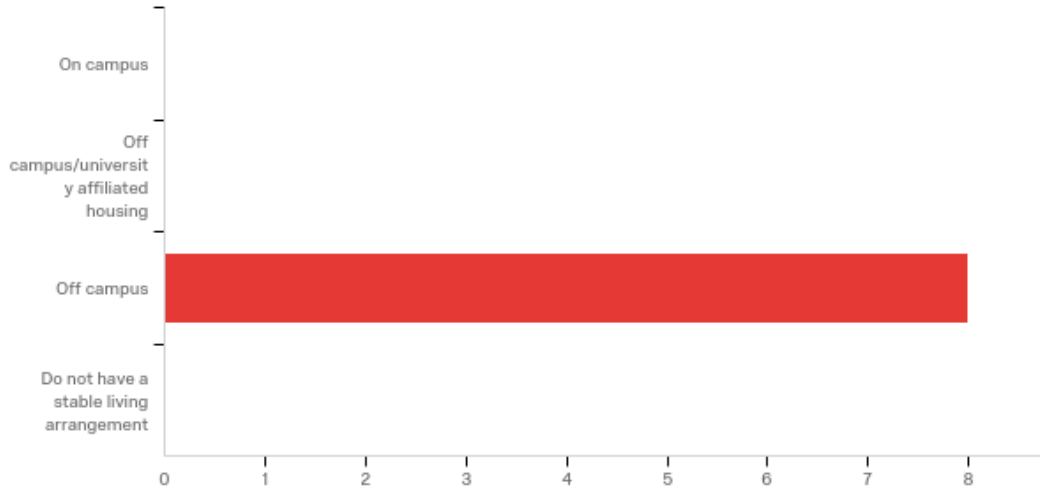
#	Answer	%	Count
1	First time in college student	0.00%	0
2	Transfer student	75.00%	6
3	Returning student	25.00%	2
	Total	100%	8

#### Q4 - Did either of your parents attend college?



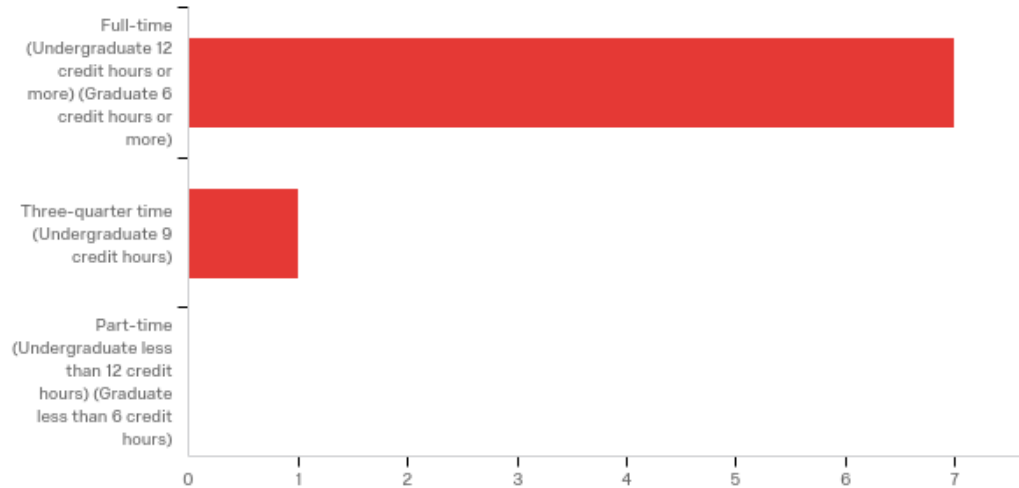
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	37.50%	3
2	No	50.00%	4
3	Maybe/Not sure	12.50%	1
	Total	100%	8

### Q5 - What are your living arrangements?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	On campus	0.00%	0
2	Off campus/university affiliated housing	0.00%	0
3	Off campus	100.00%	8
4	Do not have a stable living arrangement	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	8

## Q6 - What is your enrollment this semester?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Full-time (Undergraduate 12 credit hours or more) (Graduate 6 credit hours or more)	87.50%	7
2	Three-quarter time (Undergraduate 9 credit hours)	12.50%	1
3	Part-time (Undergraduate less than 12 credit hours) (Graduate less than 6 credit hours)	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	8

**Q7 - What is your degree major(s)? Please list all majors**

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Art Education

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Interdisciplinary Studies with areas of concentration in Behavioral/Social Sciences and Criminal Justice

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Psychology

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Nonprofit management

---

BA Health Services Administration

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Psychology

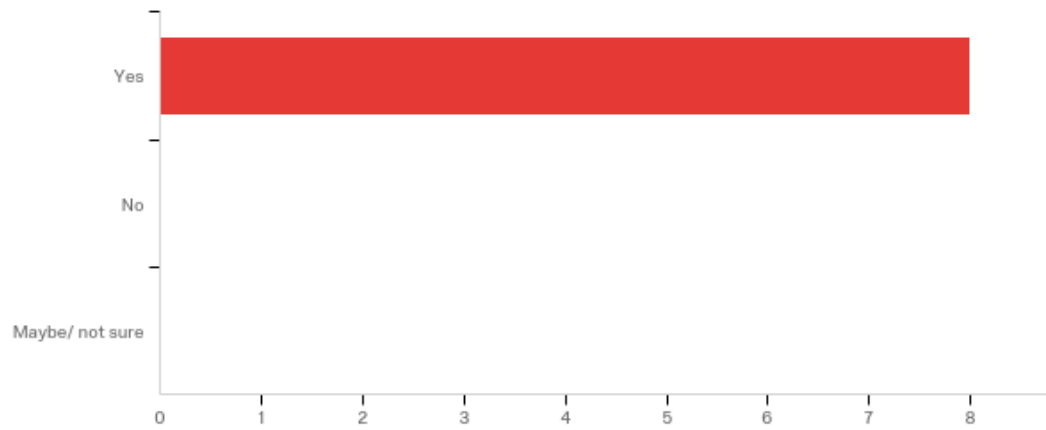
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Psychology

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Psychology

**Q8 - Are you currently a recipient of any military education benefits (ex. GI Bill)?**



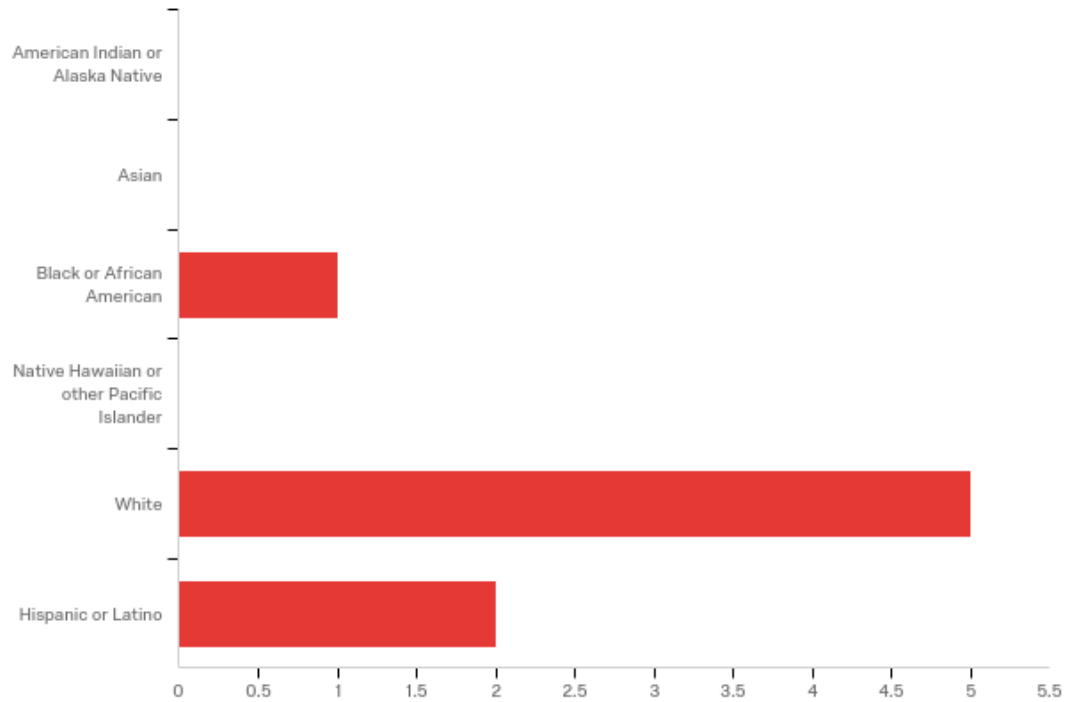
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	100.00%	8
2	No	0.00%	0
3	Maybe/ not sure	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	8



**Q9 - What year were you born? Please list actual year, month and day are not required.**

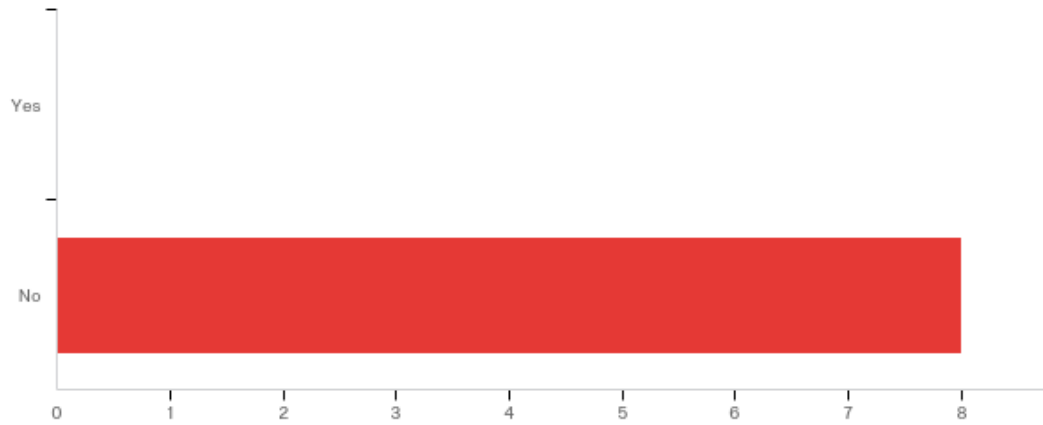
1984
1990
1990
1989
1965
1992
1992
1991

### Q10 - What is your race? (You may select more than one option)



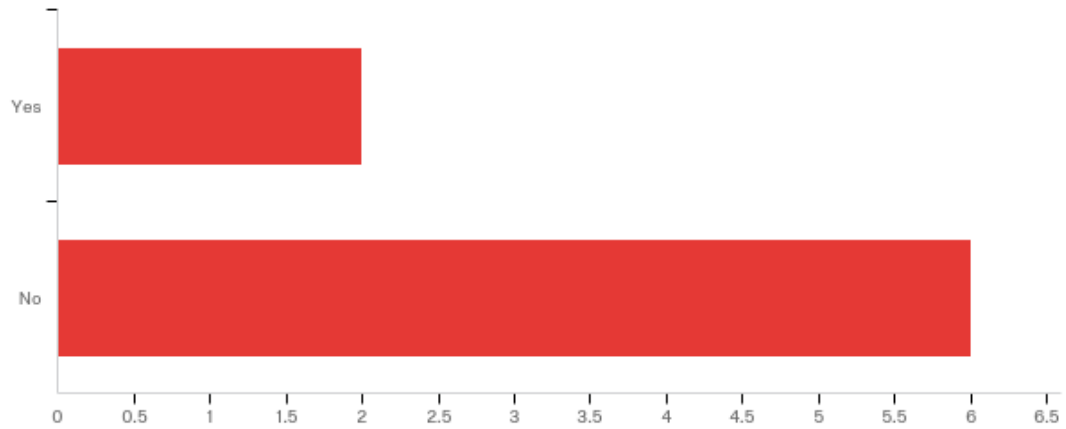
#	Answer	%	Count
1	American Indian or Alaska Native	0.00%	0
2	Asian	0.00%	0
3	Black or African American	12.50%	1
4	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.00%	0
5	White	62.50%	5
6	Hispanic or Latino	25.00%	2
	Total	100%	8

### Q11 - Are you currently on active duty?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	0.00%	0
2	No	100.00%	8
	Total	100%	8

### Q12 - Are you currently a member of a reserve unit?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	25.00%	2
2	No	75.00%	6
	Total	100%	8

**Q13 - Which branch (es) of the armed forces do/did you belong to? Please include all branches you serve (d) in.**

---

Regular Army

---

Army

---

Army

---

Air force reserves

---

Air Force

---

Army National Guard

---

USAF

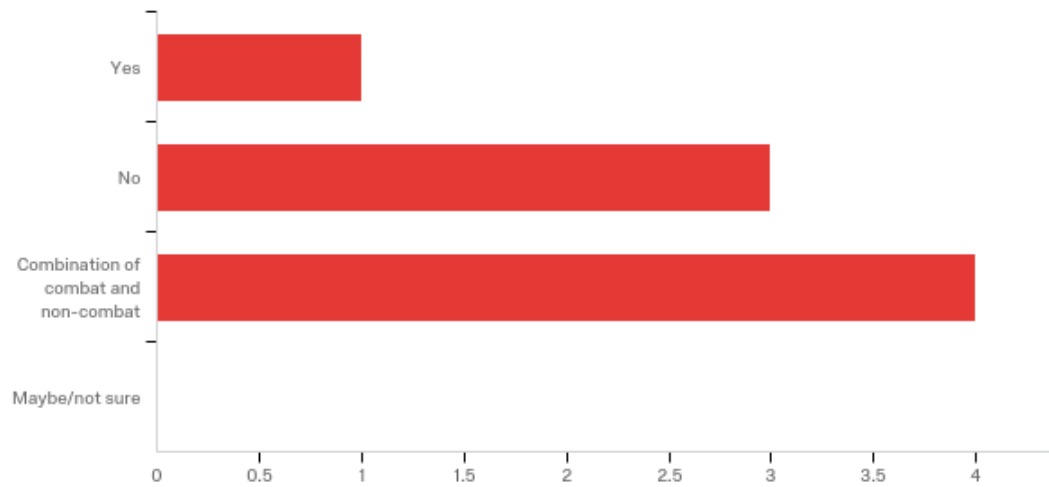
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Navy

**Q14 - How many years of military experience do you have? Please include all years combined.**

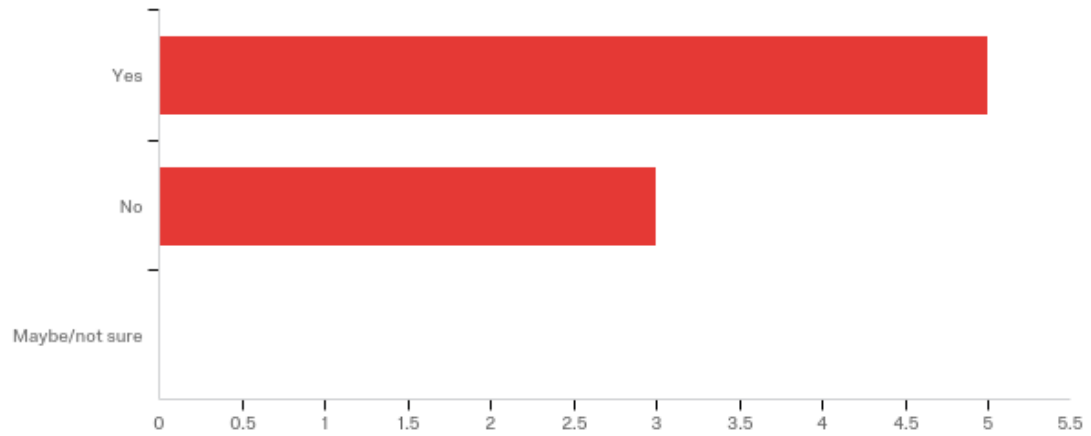
8
8
8
8
24
5 years
2yrs 9 months
3 years 8 months

**Q15 - Would you consider your experiences in the military to be combat related?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	12.50%	1
2	No	37.50%	3
3	Combination of combat and non-combat	50.00%	4
4	Maybe/not sure	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	8

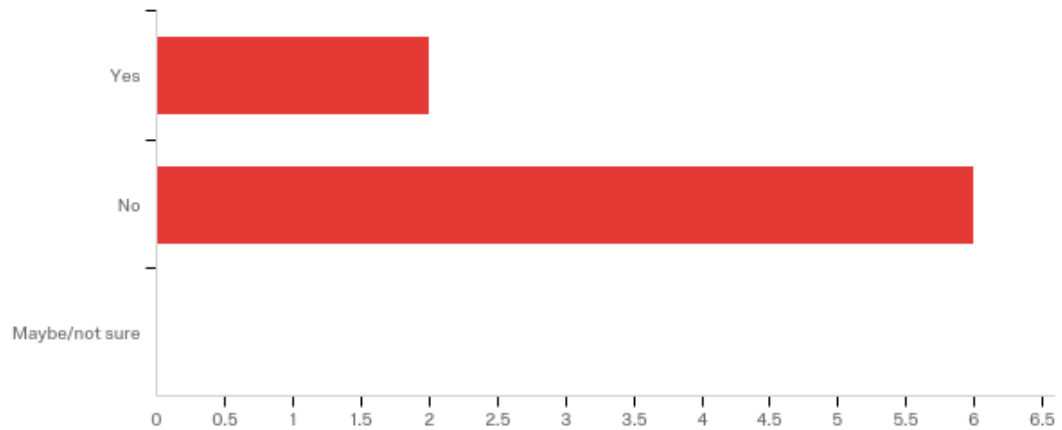
### Q16 - Do you have a service-connected disability?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	62.50%	5
2	No	37.50%	3
3	Maybe/not sure	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	8



**Q17 - Are you receiving any services for treatment of a service-connected disability? These can include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Military Sexual Trauma, or Traumatic Brain Injury.**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	25.00%	2
2	No	75.00%	6
3	Maybe/not sure	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	8

**Q19 - Please share what have been your military experiences prior to coming to college.**

---

I'm not exactly sure what this question means but I will say that there was a lot of bad experiences for the few good ones that I had.

---

I have much experience in the Transportation and Administration career areas.

---

I'm not really sure what the question is asking. It's a bit vague.

---

Maintenance, victim advocacy, supervising.

---

Average experience, with a few deployments sprinkled in.

---

I was in college when my unit deployed to Afghanistan

---

Active Duty Air Force (non-combat) with a medical retirement

---

I was a personnel specialist in the United States Navy. I attended A school for 6 weeks and then was shipped to Naval Hospital Beaufort, SC. I helped military and civilian staff check onboard, and made sure their travel pay as well as their monthly pay was adjusted correctly. I separated as a Petty officer third class.

## Q20 - Why did you decide to go to college?

---

I didn't want to stay in the military any longer. At first I planned on being in for at least 20 years but it wasn't what I expected. I chose to do something completely different from what I had been doing when I went to administer immunizations at an elementary school and felt that I really wanted to be a good part in children's lives.

---

I wanted to show my son that it is never too late. I wanted to get a career that I enjoyed but also was making a difference in the world and to make enough money so that I did not have to stress about bills.

---

It's always been a goal of mine.

---

I want to work in the nonprofit sector and I love learning

---

I attending college before I enlisted and I want to get a college degree.

---

That has always been my plan, it was to go to college I just needed benefits for college.

---

I had to get a degree to get a job making enough money to support myself and my husband when he gets off active duty. After starting college, I decided I wanted to change majors from nursing to psychology so I could eventually be able to help veterans either through the VA or private practice with specifically misdiagnosis, learning disabilities, and/or sexual trauma.

---

I wanted to take advantage of the post 911 bill and honestly just wanted to get my associates degree to start in a direction towards a career. Before starting I still was unsure of which career path I wanted to take but ended up loving psychology.

**Q21 - Please share what your experience has been as you transition from the military to college.**

---

I'm glad to get away from everything military. Honestly, I hate seeing the ROTC students, especially when they are in their uniforms. They are so misconceived about what the military is like, but the transition wasn't all easy. I'm still jumpy and the only therapy that I get for PTSD/anxiety is by completely avoiding anything that might trigger me.

---

It's been very easy for me. I am doing online so my college experience is much different than if I had to go on campus. When I have had to be on campus it's very overwhelming for me and I do not enjoy it. I experienced sexual harassment and assault while serving so certain situations are hard on my anxiety.

---

Extremely hard. People say that they're there to help but it's said only to be polite. It's an empty promise.

---

Nearly my entire military career I have been in some type of college or schooling environment. It has been difficult to struggle because the military expects their priorities to be out first which doesn't always balance out with school.

---

I retired in 2011, took a couple of courses at a for-profit school during 2012-2013. Decided this school (UoP) was a sham and applied to UCF and never looked back.

---

The first few months of applying and getting transcripts was difficult and I had to learn how to be a student again without much guidance from anyone.

---

It wasn't rough at all for me because I only served for such a short time. I also had help from my family and spouse, the only thing that I found difficult was trying to sign up at the VA in Viera for health benefits.

**Q22 - Are you typically someone who asks for assistance when you find you need it? Please explain.**

---

Not really, unless that is my absolute last option.

---

Yes but only when I truly need it. I usually figure things out on my own and end up not needing anyone else.

---

Yes. I'm currently on 80% disability and the V.A., for some reason, pushes appointments out 7 months. By the time you're seen, you forgot what the original issue was. Then, they'll only slot you for a 30-60 minutes appointment and ask that you make an appointment for all other issues.

---

Yes. I would want someone to ask me if they needed help therefore I don't mind as much asking for help when I really need it.

---

After I have tried to do the task myself.

---

I try to when I know what avenues to use, like with graduate school, for example, I have not found much guidance on how to research schools that would fit my needs/help me get into a doctorate program, or how to go about getting accommodations for the GRE.

---

Sometimes, I try to avoid asking and to figure it out on my own beforehand.

**Q23 - Do you believe your military experience has affected how you go about asking for help? Why or why not?**

---

I think that I might have already had the tendency to not ask for help but being in the military and then leaving the military only solidified those tendencies.

---

Yes. I am not quick to go into a males office or anywhere alone with a man. I prefer email or telephone and I'm much more willing to get help from a female.

---

Yes, in the military, if you ask for help, you appear to be incompetent. Asking for help outside the military, is a struggle because one's self-esteem is already damaged.

---

I think my military experience probably has affected my decision to ask for help. In the military you depend on your fellow airman and soldiers its hard not to do the same thing in the civilian world.

---

Yes and it depends on the task. I will first try to complete it on my own.

---

I do. I am still (3 years later) trying to overcome the concept of having to go through a chain of command to get answers. Also, I qualify for testing accommodations that I still struggle with actually using them because I don't want to stand out or be made to feel stupid/inferior the way my office in the military made me feel when I took tests during my service.

---

I believe so, we were taught to go up our chain of command, and sometimes depending on who was ahead of you it was uncomfortable or stupid to ask because of their response.

Where I was stationed, there were a bunch of sarcastic leaders so it was kind of difficult to ask for help lol. Some would try to make you feel stupid so it did kind of push you back from asking.

**Q24 - What is your impression of the services offered by the VA compared to the universities' services?**

---

The VA seems like a place where they want vets to go and spend all day to hopefully get help but it's like they are really just waiting for us to die off so they can stop paying any benefits. The hotline numbers are not helpful (I haven't called but a friend has), being seen for mental health has more hoops than a national hula-hoop competition and the scheduling isn't flexible if you do manage to get in. Basically, the only thing you can do is live by the hours they give you if you want to receive any help. The VARC is always helpful, the complete opposite of the VA, which is odd. Without the help of (staff) I never would have navigated the necessary paperwork to attend UCF and I was lucky to open a channel with her a year and a half out of actually applying. I was on active duty right until class started in 2014.

---

The VA services at the college are very helpful and reach out a lot even though I have only ever needed to ask 1 question. The VA outside of the university are a horrible organization and do not help soldiers. Their services are bad and they kill more people then they do help.

---

They're ok. Some of the members who volunteer in the office are a bit inappropriate as far as what is said in the common areas.

---

Overall in the 4 schools I have attended I have always had a great experience with the Veteran services. They have always been very helpful and understanding besides a few sour apples. I have very little experience with the outside VA.

---

N/A

---

I think they do the best they can and are much better than the VA office at Cocoa for EFSC

---

I feel that the University is more helpful and faster with their response than the VA.

---

**Q25 - When transitioning to college from the military from what services did you seek assistance? And what services did you receive?**

---

I spoke with (staff) extensively and she helped me gather the paperwork. When I arrived for orientation, the VARC took care of me (I found the size of the campus a bit daunting).

---

I only sought financial help when it came to using my benefits. I got the help I needed.

---

I took advantage of speaking to the counselor available, although I was referred to see the VA. I also took advantage of the facility and their abilities to provide tutors and a place to study.

---

Just services with GI bill.

---

Veteran's Affairs (VA)

---

The VA office for help with CH 33, and then I approached OSD (EFSC) and SAS (UCF) for testing accommodations as well as tutoring for the TEASE and now the GRE

---

I went to apply for health benefits at the VA in viera. I also applied for post 9-11 bill and I did receive that.



**Q26 - Please describe the issues or concerns for which you have sought help?**

---

Ha. Funny. None.

---

GI Bill help.

---

Healthcare needs, disability.

---

Test anxiety, ADHD, note taking, organization/time management/studying

---

Just the one I listed above about how confusing it was to sign up for any health benefits.

**Q27 - Can you tell me about a time when you didn't seek help but should have?**

---

Oh, there were a few but they were in the military. When a really bad situation arose, I didn't seek help, I didn't say anything until I couldn't take it anymore 6 months after the fact. If I had said something sooner, it would have been much more helpful for everyone.

---

Degree planning and also I have yet to ask for help about graduate programs. There are too many departments and people at the university and I get overwhelmed and do not know where to go or call or who to ask for help.

---

I became suicidal over the spring semester and instead of seeking help, I stayed home and allowed for my grades to suffer.

---

I went through depression in undergrad and I probably should have reached out to someone.

---

N/A

---

I should have asked for my accommodations to be used during summer classes, but I didn't and ended up having a severe panic attack during two finals. I also had a semester where I took on too many things and should have asked for help from other members of the club I was in as well as other students in SGA, but because I was never able to successfully get help with extra duties in the military, I never thought to ask others for help.

---

Listed above, health benefit.

**Q28 - Who do you get together with for support and to share information and experiences?**

---

My best friend. We have been best friends since 10th grade and we both joined the Army. I joined as a combat medic and she joined as a cook, we were never in the same place but we had a few scarily similar experiences. First me and then her, luckily since I had gone through it, I knew what she was supposed to do and being a combat medic I knew exactly what could be done.

---

No one.

---

Unfortunately, I bottle it up.

---

Coworkers and family.

---

Friends and family

---

Husband, friends, and other veterans

---

Just my spouse, close friends, and family.

**Q29 - Whom do you consider to be sources of support in order for you to be successful in college?**

---

My husband. I would probably be another homeless vet if it wasn't for him to be honest. He keeps me straight and my kids are a constant reminder why I want to be a teacher.

---

My boyfriend and my family and myself.

---

I can't think of a single person.

---

My boyfriend and family

---

Myself and family

---

family, friends in school, and other veterans I have met in classes

---

Spouse, my family.

**Q30 - Have you taken steps take to connect with other student veterans?  
Why or why not?**

---

I tend to avoid them. Usually they like to talk about their military experiences, especially deployments and being a female vet, the male vets often look down on us. I hate having to prove myself and validate myself and I'd rather not talk about deployment or anything in the military unless I absolutely have to. I got enough of that while I was in. Having to prove yourself over and over to males who consider you less than adequate simply because you are female is exhausting and it usually makes me pretty angry.

---

No. I'm not sure why. I'm not very social.

---

Not really, majority still hold a stigma towards females who were also veterans.

---

No, because I am an online student.

---

No, never thought about it.

---

Yes. I started a student veterans club at Melbourne EFSC and have reached out to veterans in my classes at UCF. I try to connect with other vets because I know how crucial it is to have someone who is familiar with your experiences on your side. It helps make you feel less alone and like you have someone there who gets it and isn't intimidated by the way you talk or act.

---

Not really, I haven't really heard of any groups that get together in my area. I kind of don't feel like I belong either because I didn't really do much at the hospital but paperwork. I also never deployed or did any tours like other veterans so I feel like there is no need for me there.

**Q31 - Do you have a need to find and connect with other women veteran students and/or faculty to share information and experiences? Why or why not?**

---

Absolutely not. I don't know any other female vets and to be honest I don't want the weight of their experiences and I don't want to drudge up old memories. Like I said, avoidance is my medicine.

---

No. I just rather leave that part of me behind and build on it and become an even better version of myself. I have a lot of hate and love towards the military and I don't like bringing up the bad.

---

YES! It would not only be more comfortable, but being from an organization that consisted of mostly men, a female would be nice to not only talk to but they would understand the sacrifice and the harassment we dealt with.

---

No. Never thought about it I suppose.

---

No, I don't have the need to connect.

---

I don't have a need, but I would like to because I think it is a great thing. I eventually want to work with this community of people and it would be helpful to get to know women veterans and what they would like to see different as far as mental health care after the military.

---

Not really, I didn't really go through a lot and I'm thankful for that. I served such a short time so I was able to transition well, didn't really have much support while I was at my past duty station.

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