


# A Case Study of Veteran and Civilian Student Academic Performance at the University of Central Florida

2018

Floyd C. Diehl Jr  
*University of Central Florida*

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A CASE STUDY OF VETERAN AND CIVILIAN STUDENT ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

by

FLOYD C. DIEHL JR

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Public Administration  
in the College of Health & Public Affairs  
and the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair; Daniel Seigler, Ph.D

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to provide a brief overview of academic standards and performance of veterans of the United States military and civilians who attend the University of Central Florida. Whether a student is a veteran or a civilian, he or she must learn how to adapt to the requirements of an academic community in order to be successful in that environment. It may be difficult for some. In able for society to discern the importance of the academic performance of both veterans and civilians alike, research is vital. There are various assumptions about veterans. For example, it can be assumed vets do not know how to adapt after leaving the military. It is important to demonstrate that most military veterans are very good at adapting and overcoming stressful situations. Time is evident for adaptability for some. As veterans re-enter society, most make clear and decisive decisions as to the life they desire to have. The modus operandi of veterans is intrinsic as it pertains to an academic setting. This research compares the academic success of both veterans and civilians at the University of Central Florida to begin this conversation. While there has been some research conducted on this topic, there seem to be various ecological fallacies pertaining to conclusions of the research that has been conducted. Academic performance needs to be researched further as well as the effects of standards regarding the performance of veterans and civilians in an academic setting.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is first, and foremost, dedicated to my daughter Brianna Diehl. You are the reason for all that I do, and you will forever be my heart, my soul, and my everything. I also dedicate this thesis to my mother, may God guide you and keep you by his side forever in peace, and to my brothers, Kenneth McClelland Jr and Greg Self, both of whom served in the U.S. Army – thank you for your honorable service to this great nation. I dedicate this thesis to John Rumble (SFC. RET.), who served this great nation for over twenty years in the U.S. Army, to Thurman Clevenger for his service in the U.S. Marines, and to all veterans past and present. I dedicate this thesis to all colleges and universities across the United States.

I dedicate this thesis to Keven Leasure, who served in the U.S. Army Rangers, and his family. Thank you for your service. I dedicate this thesis to the U.S. Army, who undoubtedly contributed to the development of my mindset and forever changed my way of thinking and my life. The greatest time of my life was without question my time in the U.S. Army. I dedicate this Honors Thesis to my fellow brothers who served in the U.S. Military and to those who did not make it back alive. To those who sustained injuries either seen or unseen. I also dedicate this to the Royal Lao Airborne Association and all Airborne Forces and associations of the world.

Finally, I dedicate this Honors thesis to Brandon Shonyo, who served in the First Infantry Division of the U.S. Army in Fallujah, Iraq. He never gave up the fight. Brandon may you rest in peace. I dedicate this to Frank Kozel, U.S. Air Force veteran. You have never given up on trying to understand the things that most people in this world could never understand.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Each year, millions of students apply to and attend colleges and universities across the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), and included in this number are veteran students who are currently serving or have served in the military and are pursuing higher education. Many of these veteran students use education benefits afforded to them through their service to help support their educational goals. There are many personal and societal benefits that come from students completing their program of study and receive their degree; however, a hasty decision to pursue post-secondary education, when a student is not mentally prepared, can often have equally negative outcomes. There are many considerations that someone seeking to enroll in post-secondary education must consider. A careful, life situational analysis should be made.

Two of these major considerations are the tangible costs (e.g. tuition, books, and other school related materials) and the intangible costs (e.g. commitment of time spent in class, studying, and working on assignments), with the latter requiring an enormous amount of discipline and time commitment by students if they are going to be successful. Therefore, it is important that any student admitted to (and who attends) college has the resources to pay for his or her education, and they must also have the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful while in school. Time management and discipline are key skills necessary for success in college.

Veterans who do decide to pursue further higher education, as noted above, typically use educational benefits they have earned through their honorable service to pay for their education. While these educational benefits cover the cost for education, it is the knowledge, skills, and abilities learned from the strict military environment that play a vital role in their success in

school. Attributes gained through military service are significant factors that should be taken into consideration when comparing and contrasting what leads to high levels of academic performance in veterans. There are times when many of the positive attributes gained from military service are overlooked by those who have never been in the military. These attributes should be taken into consideration when considering the academic performance of veterans and civilians in higher education.

In spite of any negative stereotypes that may be associated with them, veterans have much to contribute to an academic institution, especially in the area of academic rigor. This research will focus on the positive traits veterans bring with them in their pursuit of higher education degrees at the University of Central Florida (UCF) and demonstrate how these traits often lead to higher levels of academic performance. It is important to note that for the purposes of this study, the terms “college,” “university,” “higher education,” and “post-secondary education” are all used interchangeably in this paper to mean academically accredited education at two- or four-year colleges.

According to Stefenakos (2018), there are multiple paths for students after graduating from high school: (1) furthering their education academically through higher education (e.g. two- or four-year college or university); (2) enlisting in one of the military branches; or (3) entering a trade or certificate program; (4) entering the workforce; (5) taking a gap year. For this study, students at UCF are placed into two groups: (1) veteran students, who are students that have come to UCF after being honorably discharged from the military; and (2) civilian students,

which are students that have come to UCF right out of high school, two-year college, or after being in the workforce or taking a gap year.

Whether a student enters college from the military or from one of the other paths, the decision to go to college is certainly influenced by many factors. These factors can include the student's upbringing, their family's background and perspective on higher education, their ability to afford college, as well as the influences of parents and friends. Additionally, each college and university has its own unique allure to students. In fact, this decision and these influences may be overwhelming for some (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1998; Stokatch, 2006; Temple, 2009). Nonetheless, it is one of the more important decisions they will make in their life, and once a student, whether civilian or not, is admitted to college, both their academic performance and academic success begin. This academic journey will undoubtedly be life changing.

Upon entering college, each student progresses through their academic career, and they will learn new methods and strategies to apply in an academic environment. These new methods and strategies may also be passed on to other students as they progress as well. The exchanging of valuable information amongst students, whether veterans or civilians, will be beneficial to both groups. Learning to work together may take time for some, but the benefits of such cohesiveness are immeasurable. Furthermore, it would be logical to conclude that learning how to do such is going to be very important and useful. This is important especially when having to complete class assignments and projects. Many professors look for overall teamwork and commitment from their students. A lack of such could lead to negative grades being given to any number of groups. Putting differences aside and coming together to accomplish the assignment

will undoubtedly be noticed by any professor. Attention to detail and communication are essential to success. Each student should strive to do their absolute best. It will not be an easy accomplishment.

Based on this, the purpose of this research is to start a conversation into the relationship between veteran and civilian students by providing a general overview and basic understanding of academic performance and success between veteran and civilian students. It starts this look with the students at the University of Central Florida. It is the argument of this research that, on average, a veteran, via their maturity level, should better understand the stringent academic requirements and what will be expected of them in an academic setting, and therefore, perform better academically than their civilian counterparts. To test this hypothesis, this study will compare the grade point averages GPAs and graduation rates between veteran and civilian students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Basic Understanding of Academic Standards, Performance, and Success**

Since the intent of this research is to identify the academic performance and success of both veteran and civilian students, it is important to define these three terms. However, there is another term that should also be defined here: “academic standards.” Academic standards refer to the grading criteria that are used to measure levels of student success in their course work. This typically includes a letter grade (e.g. A, B, C, D, or F) that is assigned at the end of the course and criteria for receiving a specific grade is presented to each student at the beginning of each course through the syllabus. This also includes any rubric associated with graded assignments or requirements that come from crediting bodies within or outside the university (Sadler, 2014). A student’s ability to comprehend and apply these standards determines their overall academic performance. Academic performance includes all of the various activities a student engages in. Everything that contributes to their grades, and academic success, is the students overall academic performance as measured by their grade point average (GPA). Since the ultimate measure of academic success is graduation from a program of study, GPA is a major factor towards that goal. Higher academic performance should lead to higher academic success.

### **Informing Students of Academic Standards**

UCF informs incoming students of the academic standards and personal conduct requirements to which they will be held accountable through orientation (UCF Orientation, n.d.) and through its UCF Golden Rule Handbook (UCF Golden Rule, n.d.). Students are informed of what is expected of them as a student and of the consequences for poor performance or breaking

codes of conduct. The setting and maintaining of academic and personal conduct standards is undoubtedly one of the most important aspects of higher education. Setting low standards are not at all beneficial to the overall image of or the quality of education received from a college or university that does this. Additionally, students find out that upon acceptance to an institution of higher learning they must maintain certain academic requirements and codes of conduct in order to qualify for federal financial assistance. Ensuring that students understand these requirements is important because not doing so will likely result in the halting of a student's academic progression towards graduation (Arhin & Wang'Eri, 2018; Chan, 2017; Masterson, 2017; Minhas-Taneja, 2017; Robichaud, 2016). This is something that most veterans understand very well. It is logical to conclude that veterans will continue to expand upon this knowledge.

Additionally, students may be placed in remedial courses until they reach the adequate level of proficiency. For veterans, this is generally not known to be a significant issue as they are required to attend military universities and schools which require them to maintain levels of academic proficiency. However, one must remember that there are always exceptions to the rule. Not every veteran with a military background will be academically proficient in civilian academic courses. Each veteran is different as it pertains to what they may or may not remember from their previous high school. The discipline and many values learned within the United States military is not only an investment in each service member while serving, but it is also an investment for what the service member may contribute to society after leaving the military. The experiences gained while serving correlate to those veterans who pursue higher education. The attributes learned within the military will be of great use pertaining to academic performance.

## **General Influences of Student Success**

### **Personal and Family Influences**

Quality of life is to be a serious consideration in weighing the pros and cons of one's ultimate choice to continue in pursuit of higher education. For if it were not for higher education, where would society in general be? What would be the measure of success in life if not for higher education? These questions could be determined by one's own definition of what success means to each individual. There are many reasons as to why one could choose to pursue or not to pursue a degree. (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper, 1998; Stokatch, 2006; Temple, 2009).

One need not only look at the potential employment benefits of obtaining a degree but also one's socioeconomic status as it has the possibility to lead to networking. Networking could possibly lead to better career opportunities and higher income levels. Thus, the chance of improving the overall quality of life. Although a higher income and great benefits are not necessarily guaranteed by obtaining a college degree, the chances of living a productive and meaningful life are arguably increased with a degree. Once a decision has been made to further one's education, then many factors come into play. Academic success is not merely based upon applying to and getting accepted to an institution of higher learning. In fact, the aforementioned is just the beginning of one's academic journey. As students get acquainted with this new educational environment, they must learn to adapt and accept personal responsibility (Barlow, & Fleischer, 2011).

For some students in college, this is easier said than done. Now, many of them have to make time management decisions on their own. Gone are the days when their parents were



present to make sure school work was completed as in high school. Thus, the learning of personal responsibility will be the most determining factor as to whether a student will be successful or not. There are of course several factors to consider such as working students, living situation, financial well-being, children, marriage, disabilities, etc.

The average age of first time in college students seems to be trending upward in many colleges and universities across the United States (U.S. News & World Reports, 2018).

Although, the age of a person is not the sole determining factor that will lead to successfully graduating, it is a factor to be considered when reviewing the maturity level of a student. The maturity level of a student matters significantly as it can be a sign of the students understanding on how to deal with stressful situations and life in general. At some point in one's academic career, it is more likely than not, that there will be ups and downs. Knowing how to handle each unique situation could be the determining factor of success or failure. Gaining maturity will benefit the younger students. This will come with time.

As a student progresses through his or her class ranking (e.g. freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior), he or she will likely grow in maturity and understanding of academic requirements. Many things come into play such as discipline, motivation, dedication, and sheer determination. However, often the average age of college and university students has an appearance of being overlooked in a general sense. When one thinks of a person entering a two- or four-year institution of higher learning, it is typically implicitly inherent that the student will be entering at a young age more often than not (Richardson, 1994).

Reviewed research and logical evidence found that there was, in fact, a sufficient amount of information leading to the rejection (overgeneralization and stereotyping) of adults pertaining to maturity and loss of academic abilities over time. In fact, the results found that the essential skills for proficient, reliable study habits were counter to some critics. Those critics that maintained the theory that mature students were underprepared for significant study discipline habits required at post-secondary institutions of higher learning colleges and universities. The theories of critics could not substantiate a consistent, reliable factual basis pertaining to the totality of empirical evidence needed to draw the conclusion that mature students lacked the intellectual capabilities of academic learning (Richardson, 1994).

The subject matter directly relating to maturity level and academic abilities would logically indicate that higher maturity levels would be productive as opposed to being counterproductive. Pertaining to tendencies of mature students having less success in the completion of course requirements is evidently dependent upon various factors. These factors could include current employment, medical issues, family obligations, financial, etc. However, the necessity to not overgeneralize is of great importance. As many mature students have personal life struggles. There are many who continue to be very successful regardless of potential negative issues they may or may not be facing in their personal life (Richardson, 1994).

There may be a possibility that a mature student might not graduate. However, it does not necessarily lead to a definitive conclusion that it is because their performance is any less than that compared to younger students. The indication of deficiencies because of age progression is not empirically substantiated. As a result, the intellectual abilities needed pertaining to an

academic environment, and the maturity of a student would logically conclude that higher maturity levels would lead to better cognitive proficiency (Richardson, 1994).

Learning the significance of time management and developing good study habits will be beneficial to the student. Academic performance can be very competitive between high achieving students. A student's academic grade point average is something that should never be overlooked or underestimated. Most universities maintain policies that inform the student via assigned academic advisors that each student has a responsibility to at least maintain a certain GPA (2.0 GPA) or better (Thibodeaux, Deutsch, Kitsantas, & Winsler, 2017).

#### Institutional Influences and Remedies for Student Success

If a student falls below the academic standards, they may be placed on academic probation or temporary suspension, and, if they fail to improve during this time, they can be permanently suspended from said institution. Universities want students to succeed, and therefore, typically offer assistance to students that may need specific help in their various subjects. Tutors are usually available to assist students in times of need. Tutoring can be a major determining factor as to whether or not a struggling student passes a class with a passing grade. Potential students applying to academic institutions of higher learning come from all walks of life. Some may be senior citizens, active or reserve military personnel, veterans, or possibly an employee of the specific institution itself. (Young, Turnage-Butterbaugh, Degges-White, & Mossing, 2015).

There are incentives and rewards usually available for high achieving students. Students who strive to make the highest grade possible in every class and maintain a high-grade point

average are typically offered memberships to academic honor societies. Being invited to these academic honor societies can be very beneficial as they offer many benefits to students to include scholarships, grants, letters of recommendation and possible internships, etc.

Universities also have benefits available to high performing students. Some students could be placed on the dean's list for every semester they meet the requirements of such. Some students will be placed on the president's honor roll each semester. The university will likely offer scholarships, grants, or other types of rewards for students who have and maintain high-grade point averages. Letters of recommendation can also be another significant benefit to high achieving students. The letters can lead to awards and recognitions, acceptance to graduate school, internships, or jobs that lead to a successful career path.

Academic performance at any given time can be affected by a crisis of various degrees. Universities typically have policies related to unexpected life-changing events. Such as medical issues, family emergencies, or in some case even the death of a student. Upon receiving official documentation of those mentioned above; the university will begin a process of applying rules and regulations. The university officials understand that unexpected emergencies happen. They are usually very supportive and understanding. Upon receiving official documentation substantiating the claim, the school officials may offer an Incomplete (I) grade to assist the student, along other services (e.g. counseling services, etc.) (Domocmat, M. L., 2015).

They may also offer the student the chance to withdraw from classes without penalty entirely or may provide the student to accept an incomplete grade. Thus, allowing the student to pick up where they left off in the class if they so choose this option. Once their life

circumstances become normal again if ever is the case, they will complete only the coursework left as of the date they accepted the incomplete grade option. There may be other options for each academic institution and their policies (Wheland., Butler, Qammar., Katz., & Harris., 2012).

Academic success will not only open definite possibilities in one's life but will undoubtedly be an everlasting memory. Family support, can influence what determines if a student makes it to graduation. A student has a much better chance of graduating if they have a stable support system to include family members and friends who have high moral compasses in life. The desire to succeed is inevitably the choice of the student (Wen, William, Lesley, 2012).

Various decision-making factors correlate to making it to graduation. There are many other factors considered when reviewing what determines the success rate of students who start secondary education as compared to those who graduate. There are various academic support opportunities at colleges and universities if a student finds their self-struggling. Performance is at all times actively monitored by professors, academic advisors and other college or university officials such as the financial aid department. Financial aid requirements must be met and maintained for qualified students to continue receiving financial assistance (Dill, 2014).

### Financial Impacts on Student Success

Being able to afford tuition, fees, room and board, meals, transportation and other cost can be extremely expensive dependent upon which college or university one decides to attend. So many factors to consider when one elects to continue their education in an institution of higher learning. If one qualifies for financial aid, there are various opportunities to assist a student such as work study, flexible part-time employment opportunities on campus, school

loans, and other sources. Financial aid is based on several factors to include the student's age upon entering secondary education. Students who are still dependent upon their parents may be required to submit their parent's income and tax returns just to name a few possible requirements (Schudde, & Scott-Clayton, n.d).

According to Pingel (2017), an analysis was previously conducted about individual states and the educational, financial need of all 50 states. The study noted a 5 percent change in various types of individual states and U.S. territories financial need over a five-year span of observation and research. The findings and conclusions were different among states and territories when comparing and contrasting. The U.S. Department of Education is of particular interest as it is the primary source for providing financial assistance to those students in need and qualify for such.

An important aspect of financial assistance to students during their academic years are those offered by donors. Significant recognition should be given to those donors who have made contributions no matter how big or small the contributions may have been. Donors are not exactly looking for recognition but make contributions for various reasons. However, the overall affect it has as it pertains to a student's financial situation could very well play a significant role in the assisted students' academic success. Academic university acceptance rates fluctuate for various reasons and is in direct correlation to academic financial aid, retention rates, among other factors (Kerkvliet, J., & Nowell, C. 2014). At a quick glance, it would seem as though acceptance by a particular university or college would not be easy, but rarely does one stop to think about the specifics pertaining to all the required funding that goes into assisting accepted students. In fact, according to Kerkvliet and Nowell (2014), "Tuition rates and freshman and senior public subsidy rates substantively determine university revenues and possible surpluses.

These rates, in turn, are determined by policy-makers (i.e. legislatures and governing boards) concerned with access to undergraduate education and graduation success.” (p. 662).

### Time Management and Student Success

Upon acceptance to an institution of higher learning, students must learn how to understand each professor’s syllabus pertaining to their class schedules, assignments, grading, attendance policies, etc. A syllabus for any particular class will provide detailed instructions on course requirements. If a student fails to meet these requirements the outcome negatively impacts progress. Understanding any particular syllabus can be confusing. However, one would think new students generally learn to ask various questions if confused. Those who do not learn to communicate effectively will have the most difficulty. The syllabus for each class is of great importance, as it sums up the course requirements in detail and its correlating schedule for each week. According to a survey conducted by Smith and Razzouk (1993), it “confirmed a hunch that academicians have had for years--that students do not use the syllabus as intended.” (p.1)

Undoubtedly, the reiteration of paying attention to detail in a timely manner will provide a pathway to attain positive academic attributes to those who lack such. This starts with the orientation session at any institution of higher learning and continues until a student drops out or graduates. The necessity to rely on others for one’s academic needs is non-existent. Once learned, self-reliance is without any doubt a major contributor to academic performance and achievement. Pressure and stress will become a student’s reality. If a student learns how to deal with and manage difficult situations then it will most certainly be beneficial. For those who are

prone to buckling under stress and or pressure it will certainly contribute to some type of negative academic affect. Thus, this too is a determining factor in making it to graduation.

If a student finds themselves juggling between the balance of employment and higher education then time management will be key. Cognitive proficiency could be affected by things such as lack of sleep, good eating habits etc. So, maintaining a healthy life style both mentally and physically will play a very important role in academic success. To underestimate the consequences of not balancing such could be detrimental. Being student and trying to achieve academic success will most certainly be a defining moment in one's life. Understanding one's own patterns of work and academic ethic will better assist in a student's overall level of performance. Not performing to standards could lead to as previously mentioned to academic probation or possibly permanent suspension. (Hensley, Wolters, Won, & Brady, 2018).

The expected outcome of learning time management and discipline would logically conclude that a student will make it to the day of graduation. Along the way they can apply what they learned in an academic setting in a real-world environment. The life lessons learned would likely lead to one being able to attain a higher socio-economic status and content in one's life.

### **Average Academic Performance**

In this study, average academic performance is defined by a student's GPA. When referring to average academic performance at UCF, it will be in direct correlation to a student's academic ability to meet and maintain a GPA set by the academic college or university. Typically, at the University of Central Florida, the grade point average needed to pass various classes is generally considered to be the letter grade of "C" however U.C.F. does allow a letter



grade of “D” for some classes. This letter grade is representative of what the word "average" means regarding the minimum requirements to not only maintain academic institutional requirements but also refers to financial aid purposes as well. The letter grade of “C” is considered standard average performance by most of colleges and universities within the United States. Hopefully academic scholars will raise these standards.

The letter grade of “C” is representative of a 2.0 which is the bare minimum academic point average that is usually to be maintained. Although, there are some institutions that allow for a grade of “D” or 1.0 as acceptable for degree completion. The grade letter of “D” has the appearance of lowering standards at academic institutions of higher learning. Considering that the acceptable average letter grade is “C” why would colleges and universities allow the letter grade of “D” to be acceptable for the awarding of a degree of any kind? A study provided significant details in correlation a students’ academic success.

According to a study conducted of undergraduate psychology students'. When correlating grades and positive behaviors the outcome was that of good academic performance. Irrelevant of a students’ end of semester grade, 5 percent of students (plus) indicated that three specific behaviors that affected their grade in a positive manner. Attending class on a consistent basis, giving significant attention to lectures in class and good sleeping habits (Perlman, McCann, & Prust, 2007).

So, one can logically conclude that personal responsibility and certain positive behaviors could most certainly contribute to the success of any student. However, in this context, it would seem logical to suggest that this would certainly be true regarding veterans. When thinking of

average, there may or may not be negative connotations dependent upon the context and manner of which it is used. However, it would be safe to say veterans are anything but average.

Performance relating to academics is without a doubt a subject that needs further examination and research. Factual, empirical based evidence is needed to elaborate on the subject matter. To base performance solely on unsubstantiated conclusions is immoral. Outcomes regarding that of average academic performance will require specific detailed information that leads to logical conclusions and findings. It is of great importance that the standards about what is to be considered "average" be well defined.

If current standards are continuously politicized, it is unequivocally going to be the demise of academic integrity within colleges and universities alike. The average is something that should be considered regarding the direct reference to raising standards not lowering standards. If post-secondary institutions used logical deductive reasoning in setting higher grade point average requirements, it would be evident that academic performance is not to be lowered but to be maintained. Consideration should be given to those with mitigating circumstances such as disabilities. The ultimate goal is to motivate students to achieve high academic performance.

### **Veterans Performance in an Academic Setting**

Those who make the life changing decision to serve in the United States military have chosen to make the ultimate sacrifice to put others needs above their own. This choice is not made easily as one could just have also decided to pursue a different path in one's life. Serving the citizens of the United States is no easy feat, to say the least. To put others safety and needs above one's own personal interest is without a doubt the most significant statement a person can make in one's life. It takes a special person to know that they have a possibility of imminent

death but continue to serve regardless of knowing full well the hazards of one's chosen profession.

The sheer path from the outset of swearing the oath of allegiance as follows:

“I, \_\_\_\_\_, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God" (<https://www.army.mil/values/oath.html>)” is without a doubt a defining moment in one’s life.

There are many things a service member learns to accept while serving in the military the following are but just a few: loyalty, discipline, integrity, honor, commitment, intestinal fortitude, duty, motivation, dedication, reliability, maintaining a positive attitude no matter how dire the situation, teamwork, trust, the ability to adapt and overcome any situation, maintaining high standards, high physical fitness standards, selfless service, respect, personal courage, and the strict avoidance of procrastination and complacency etc. Though not all-inclusive those above are some of the few that will ultimately play a vital role in the academic success of a military veteran. Applying these knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA’s) will undoubtedly lead to higher level of academic performance of veterans.

According to Kirchner (2015), the very understanding of veterans can be a complicated process to college and university officials. The necessity to study the resources needed by veterans is of the utmost importance. Veterans come from all walks of life and from all over the

United States and its U.S. territories. They are discharged from all branches of service when they have met their service contract requirements. They apply to and attend post-secondary institutions universities from all over the United States. Some face enormous hardships and are often overlooked and overgeneralized. This could lead some veterans to have negative experiences and difficulty transitioning into an academic setting. However, this does not apply to every single veteran (Kirchner, 2015).

In fact, the veterans who do decide to further their education go through various types of discrimination. In reference to universities and colleges starting "veteran resource centers," it is clearly understood by many veterans that these "veterans' resource centers" are not only in place to "process" military and Veterans Affairs benefits but to also "keep an eye on those veterans." Overgeneralization of veterans is of course apart of the subject matter. Overgeneralization and stereotyping can lead to grading bias by some professors having a direct effect on veterans GPA

Many veterans understand that the bond and brotherhood they had in the military is no longer the environment in which they find themselves. Veterans transitioning into an academic setting have great skills and capabilities to stand out above their fellow civilian classmates (not all but some) in many aspects. Though, common sense would dictate an understanding that veterans will more likely than not get along better with classmates who are very well disciplined themselves. The following peer-reviewed research titled: "For-Profit Institutions and Student Veteran Data" (Subtitle: "For-Profit Institutions and Student Veteran Data") gives considerable insight into the following:

Veterans who have served honorably have earned what's known as the G.I. Bill. The bill was first introduced in 1944. The G.I. Bill provides financial assistance to veterans at post-secondary educational institutions college and universities (Massa, & Gogia, 2017).

Regardless of media and political oversight pertaining to for-profit colleges and universities, there has been significant, consistent conjectures pertaining to the lack of peer-reviewed, scholarly research statistics regarding experiences of veterans at colleges and universities. Thus, a significant nature of research and accurate information is needed pertaining to post-secondary institutions and veterans (Jones, & Garrity, 2017).

Veterans are without a doubt very conscious about the grades in which they earn while attending universities. The understanding as it pertains to the significance of their performance is indicative of the lifestyle learned within the military. The very nature of a military environment requires that one must conform and be susceptible to change at any given time. On a moment's notice, a life-changing event could inevitably take place. A veteran understands this very well. The concept that one must be as ready as possible as one can be regardless of what may come.

The moral compass of veterans is of the utmost importance. The factors that contribute to the healthy mental state of veterans are what's to be taken into consideration. Some might wonder how veterans go through so much pain and loss without ever having considered the fact that some veterans do not experience such. If there were to be a common denominator amongst veterans, it would undoubtedly be honor and all it entails. What does honor have to do with the performance of a student one might ask? Well in the military honor is what every service member must have to maintain the freedoms that American citizens in particular have.

Maintaining honor is required and is reflected in one's performance. Performance-based evaluations are conducted on a regular basis. Merit-based evaluations are of great importance as it portrays a service member's commitment to honor. There are various military schools that veterans may have graduated from that veteran students can have evaluated by colleges and universities. Universities can conduct a military transcript evaluation and award actual college or university credits. The number of credits granted to veterans is based upon what specific military occupational specialty (MOS) they graduated from within a specific military school (Anonymous, 1991).

The military schools attended by veterans are extremely strict in nature. They require nothing less than the military student's absolute best. The consequences of not performing to military standards can be detrimental to one's military time in service and or career. This can include minor punishment such as having to repeat a course/school. However, it could very well include what's known as an article fifteen (Article 15) a.k.a. non-judicial punishment or in extreme cases a direct court-martial. Poor performance unequivocally will not be tolerated under any circumstances. The consequences for misconduct are unlike any other in society (A Sixth Amendment Right to Counsel under Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, 1974).

At the very outset, a veteran must make a choice to pursue a degree from a college or university, etc. They fully understand what's at stake and the direct correlation between personal responsibility and academic performance. Most universities will have somewhat of an understanding about the veteran's attributes that will more than likely lead them to success. Ultimately only time will tell the outcome of a particular veteran making it to graduation. One

thing that is absolute for the majority of veterans is the mindset to never give up and never give in no matter what the cost. Veterans genuinely understand that there can be no gain without sacrifice. Giving all no matter what the cost is the mindset that veterans have developed.

When speaking of veterans and performance some might conclude that there is no difference in the term “performance.” In fact, for veterans, they see civilian lives depending upon their performance. High performance is a way of life for veterans. One might ask how? In civil society people generally go about their day to day lives and most never think or understand the sacrifices that must be made in order to maintain the absolute freedoms they have.

Most civilians in society have no clue as to why the United States has the strongest and most well-trained military in the world. They go through their day to day lives without ever thinking about what it takes to even make it to becoming a soldier, marine, sailor, or airman. Performance is and will forever be at the forefront of all veterans. Military service is without a doubt not for most people in this world. The attrition rate on battlefields of all wars and conflicts is directly dependent upon sheer performance. So, when veterans enter an academic environment they quickly assess the requirements needed to complete the mission (e.g. make it to graduation).

Whether it be academically or career wise. The fact that the majority of veterans will always continue to better themselves via education, trade schools, apprenticeships etc. is a testament to the core values they continue to uphold. From an observational standpoint it would be safe to say that in a practical sense many civilians respect the code of honor, values, and integrity that veterans bring to their communities. As veterans and the various veteran’s organizations continue to fight for the promise that was made to them so long ago by President

Abraham Lincoln as it relates to the American Civil War and the promise he made to veterans. The promise made “to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan” (Abraham Lincoln: Second Inaugural Address, 2005).

Is it plausible to suggest that veterans perform above average in regards to academic performance and exceeding academic standards? There is reasonable common knowledge evidence to suggest that this might be the case. In many cases when the idea of a challenge comes to mind pertaining to veterans, the performance challenge is gladly accepted. To contribute to the research of veterans and academic standards and performance many things need be considered. A veterans well-being should be carefully observed as veterans also have life struggles that could affect their academic performance. However, certain things should be taken into consideration. Veteran quality of life plays an important role when pursuing higher education. A veterans traumatic experiences may or may not contribute or predict a negative correlation between standards and performance (Williston, & Roemer, 2017)

### **Academic Performance of Civilian University Students**

Civilian academic performance is to be fair and unbiased as it pertains to the average academic performance of students and the possible causes and effects of said performance. When thinking of academic performance, there are several factors to consider as aforementioned in the introduction of chapter one. All things considered, it is with great caution that the various number of contributing factors about civilian academic performance is carefully reviewed. As the subject matter of civilian academic performance is compared to that of veterans there may or may not be significant differences depending on several possible factors.



Civilian students in this context will be those of which have no military background or veteran status. While attending colleges and universities across the United States, the clear majority of students are those coming from civilian backgrounds. The lifestyle of civilian students may differ in many aspects. However, the one thing most of college and university students have in common is their common goal to achieve a higher education level. These common goals most often include students who wish to attain a better quality of life for themselves and if applicable their families as well. Reaching their goal is the priority for most.

It must be noted that civilian students have made a conscious decision to at least try to better themselves via higher education level and this should also be beneficial to society in general. There are in fact numerous types of both qualitative and quantitative research theories that have addressed the subject matter of civilian academic performance and graduation rates from colleges and universities across the United States. It is logical to suggest that as time changes all things pertaining to the subject matter and its related theories will change as well.

One of the many factors contributing as to whether or not a student succeeds is that of self-esteem. Self-esteem is especially important as common sense would dictate that one needs to be able to maintain a high level of self-esteem to progress through their academic career. A study conducted by Arshad, Zaidi, and Mahmood (2015) concluded that self-esteem, in fact, is directly related to academic performance based upon a student's pattern of behaviors. Self-esteem is just one of many possible contributing factors to be considered regarding civilian academic performance. However, motivation, dedication, perseverance, study habits, time management, discipline, etc. are ultimately what leads to the success of civilian and veterans alike. A student

who understands the significance of the skills as mentioned earlier will learn to incorporate all that is required to be successful and ultimately make it to graduation.

Also, as previously mentioned, family support can be a significant factor in the success of a student. If students are underprepared for the lifestyle of what is required of college and university students, then there are more than likely going to be repercussions of economic proportions. Typically, but not always at some point high schools with graduating seniors are given information and encouraged to continue their education. The students are informed about the potential benefits of higher education and the significance of such. However, the effects of underprepared students would appear to be a very significant factor in the admissions process of colleges and universities. Simply put, if one is not prepared, then failure seems plausible.

Initially, institutions of higher education must decide if to accept an applicant or not. Thus, an application process has generally been completed by the potential student. If the decision is favorable and grants admission to the applicant then both the institution and student will fundamentally be committed via a contractual agreement. Tax revenue via federal Pell grants, state grants, school loans, etc. generally provides assistance to those students who qualify.

Both two and four-year institutions (i.e. colleges and universities) will have a direct responsibility to provide academic support to a student who is, in fact, underprepared for certain college-level educational courses. Tutors are available to assist students with academic issues. The institution will likely provide possible remedial courses that a student may need. A student may be advised or to voluntarily partake in study groups (Mulvey, 2008).

A student must come to an understanding that at any moment changes may be needed to adapt and overcome an unexpected issue. These issues if appropriately addressed by the student will help them learn how to confront various possible unorthodox situations. Maintaining a simplistic attitude will certainly not be beneficial to the student. Understanding the academic environment in which a student finds themselves is a process that comes with time and experience. Especially as one progresses through their freshman, sophomore, junior and senior years. Developing a mindset to never give up and never given in. This will be very beneficial in achieving a psychological pathway towards one's own goal of reaching self-actualization in life.

To sustain recruitment and retention rates at post-secondary institutions of higher learning potential high school graduate students must be observed. The direct correlation between high schools and universities is without a doubt vital as it pertains to meeting the requirements for acceptance to a specific institution. If high school students are not academically prepared for the strict academic environment of college and universities, this could be costly to the potential student and taxpayers in general. The subject matter should not be taken lightly.

Current students in society are underprepared as compared to previous generations of students. In today's society, there are many obstacles that a student must face. Students are entering colleges underprepared for the strict academic environment. Around 73 percent of reports from college and university academic deans show increasing numbers of students who require remedial education. At two-year institutions, there was a 64 percent need and at four-year institutions there was an 81 percent need for developmental academic courses (Levine, & Cureton, 1998).

So, as newer generations of potential college and university students wish to attend their preferred institution of higher learning what changes will need to be made? To continue lowering the standards would undoubtedly be detrimental to not only the student but society in general. If the preparation of students is to have a negative effect because of the lack of such preparation, then positive change needs to take place. The significance of high school academic performance will likely reflect on specific indications of future college and university performance.

Institutions should set attainable goals to gradually increase their admissions and graduation rates. However, some college and universities are now networking with high schools to produce a more college level prepared student. This pre-college preparation will assist high school students in what is required at the college and university levels. It should be noted that colleges and universities should not increase their admissions and graduation rates at the expense of high standards and performance (Pierson, Hodara, & Luke, 2017).

### **Veteran Versus Non-Veteran Performance**

When comparing veterans to their counterparts or non-veteran students there can be some significant differences. The knowledge, skills, and abilities learned within the military will more likely than not be very beneficial to the veteran. Though, not all veterans apply every lesson learned from their time in the military in an academic setting. Significant differences between civilians and military veterans may not always be readily evident. However, for those differences that can be observed, there could be substantial indicators as to why a veteran may or may not outperform their civilian counterpart. The following is about differences between the two:

“It is obvious, that in fact, veteran performance is significantly higher in the vast majority of groups in every semester except one group from fall semester. No present explanatory reason is available about this specific semester” (Atkinson, 1949). While this statement is not all inclusive, it does, however, give considerable insight as to how veterans may be observed in an academic setting when compared to civilian students.

In many ways, it would seem logical to suggest that veterans could be expected to outperform civilian students. What could possibly lead some academic scholars to draw this conclusion? It may differ among academic scholars; however, maturity level could very well be a commonly observed indicator. An early study was conducted, and the following results were observed:

When looking for trends pertaining to academic grade point average (GPA) specific observations were made. As the average mean was that of 56 in proficiently levels for veterans when compared to non-veterans who weren't as proficient. After reviewing the grades of veterans and comparing them to civilian students, there was no founding as it pertains to veterans being majorly handicapped from the start of their academic coursework. There were no definitive indicators suggesting the possibility that veterans could not remember particular knowledge, skills, and abilities pertaining to what was needed in order to be academically successful. There were no serious disadvantages that could not be made up with sheer motivation (Frederiksen, & Schrader, 1952).

When comparing and contrasting the differences between civilian and veteran students, it is possible to notice the mindset of both. An example could be those civilian students who

relatively similar to veteran students have a strict level of self-control and self-reliance. Those who understand the significance of hard work and study habits etc. This is not to say that other students have no inclination of the possible outcomes and consequences of just average performance. It is however suggestive that one student could possibly better understand the potential benefits of a higher GPA than another fellow student.

College and university officials might take into consideration re-emphasizing the significance of such grade point average on a consistent basis (not that some institutions do not already do so). This is not to say that all institutions of higher learning are complacent on informing students about the subject matter and the significance of such. The need for change is ever present as time is ever changing and adaptations are clearly needed. The needs of students vary in many ways. Many universities have support structures to assist both veteran and civilian students alike. The supporting structures of colleges and universities can mean the difference between success leading to graduation or absolute failure.

Performance can be observable in many different aspects. The determining factors of performance can change at any given time. The students who accept responsibility and take responsibility for their actions are ideal. Those who apply life lessons learned are more prone to success. Veterans understand this from the outset of their academic journey. On the contrary civilian students are not always understanding of such. This is not to say that civilian students cannot learn how to do the aforementioned. Perhaps, veterans could assist those that may struggle with learning how to overcome difficulties etc. Time and effort will likely be at the forefront of learning such skills. Although, this isn't to say that some civilians don't have such.

Performance within its self is unbiased. The social construct of those individuals who have a tendency to maintain the ideology that life's unfairness is directed specifically at them is unfounded. The unfairness mentality of life is a reality that many people may hold when something doesn't seem to fit their narrative of how things should be. To combat this social ideology as it pertains to performance and standards and the lowering of such. Society must choose to rid the feel sorry for me mentality that essentially leads to negative connotations. This applies to all students but especially pertaining to those who seek to maintain high levels of performance. The development of a disciplined mindset takes time to achieve.

This should imply that the use of common knowledge is self-evident and that realistically feeling sorry for one's self and putting the blame on society for one's own failures is absurd. Indications of poor performance whether it be by veterans or civilians alike can be very common in nature. Academically there are standards to be met and maintained. Although, social support is of significant value when performance is at the forefront of determining success.

### **Academic Standards**

When referring to the subject matter of academic standards, it is essential to understand why standards are in fact of great importance. Especially when taken into consideration what factors come into play regarding the significance of grade point average and maintaining such. For if not for standards of what use would be that of education? Well, in fact, there must be a basis of foundation as it pertains to a level of measurement of academic abilities.

Every college and university must be applied to by students who submit applications to institutions of higher learning. Those who either obtain their general equivalency diploma (GED)

or graduate from high schools across the United States must be able to meet the specific admission requirements. The requirements set forth by colleges and universities are an absolute necessity. Each potential student will submit pre-college level academic records. Some students as aforementioned may have had an opportunity to gain actual college credits while in high school. Admissions determinations are made on each completed application.

There are many factors as to why or why not a student may be accepted to their preferred institution. However, some factors to be considered are those of which consist of a potential student's background. In this context, reference will be directed to those of who are veterans and as well of those who are not. Each institution sets academic standards and any exceptions to the rules and regulations are made on a case by case basis. Some factors to consider when selecting potential students are disabilities, military status, veterans, criminal background, and of course previous high school or GED academic records.

The consideration of applications by veterans to colleges and universities are somewhat more complicated. The fact that, veterans who are honorably discharged and who have paid one-hundred dollars a month for the first twelve months of their enlistment into the military receive what is commonly known as the GI bill. This is a significant factor when considering a veteran's application to colleges and universities. This benefit earned through honorable service is typically used for post-military financial assistance at institutions of higher learning.

The standards required by the U.S. military to serve and ultimately receive an honorable discharge are significantly different than those who have chosen a different path in civilian life. What is the significance of this one might ask? Well upon entering military service. Life as one



previously knew it no longer exists. Thus, changes in one's previous civilian lifestyle ceases to exist effective immediately. Standards are instilled from day one to each military recruit. These standards will forever change the previous civilian mentality for the rest of one's life. The standards within the military are unlike no other on earth. The fact is that human lives and their existence are entirely dependent upon maintaining such extremely high standards.

As it pertains to the mentality of civilian student applicants to institutions of higher education, it is not to say that there are not those who are an exception to the rule of high standards. In fact, some civilians are exceptionally talented students who have high academic, civil standards. However, when comparing between those of civilians and veterans, it is more likely than not that in some manner or another, all things considered, veterans would stand out above most of their civilian counterparts. However, it must be noted as is everything else in life there is always an exception to the rule. Nothing should be assumed without empirical or logical evidence. Research all things pertaining to cannot be overestimated.

The State of Massachusetts tested Bay State high school students and provided a test to all their students to include those planning on registering at post-secondary institutions and to those who had no current plans of doing so. The test provided to the students was the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). This specific test could, in fact, correlate to that of a student's future aspirations. The significance of this test could very well indicate a student's motivation to proceed with furthering their education at post-secondary institutions of higher learning. The significance of academic standards would be shown through the results of a student's test results to some extent (Phelps, 2015).

Academic scholars should fully understand that their students' class room learning environment is in fact where the war for maintaining academic standards begin. One would like to think that most academic scholars fully understand that they set the academic operational tempo for students both civilians and veterans alike. With time comes change. However, with change, that does not mean that lowering the standards should be acceptable or become the status quo.

Students need to come to terms with reality and really dig deep down inside and develop the intestinal fortitude to drive on and continue to maintain high moral academic standards. Team work and dedication will not alone suffice or replace the need for academic ethics. Moral support at all levels by all acquainted or unacquainted scholars will play an unimaginable role in the progression of a student. These scholars are leaders and are responsible for setting academic standards of students. As some scholars strive for progression and not regression pertaining to academic standards. There will likely always be some stiff resistance to change. Although, it is without any doubt that those who oppose the raising of standards are those likely to be politically motivated by a particular political agenda. In today's day and age, it's truly appalling to let politics interfere with the potentially bright futures of those who understand the significance of maintaining high academic standards.

It would seem logical to conclude that the U.S. Department of Education would mandate all colleges and universities maintain high academic standards. Research will likely benefit society in general if such research is conducted on a consistent basis. However, the educational responsibility should not solely be that of the federal government. It should as well, be fairly delegated to the individual states. Incentives could be utilized for those states and their academic

institutions who meet or exceed academic expectations. After all, it is not merely the quantity of graduates that matter but in fact the quality of graduates.

The quality of education seems to be an on-going debate within the political realm of society. Thus, all the more reason to pursue the consistency of standards of significant quality. Some may find it interesting that many years ago people who attended universities also had personal responsibilities. In fact, many faculty, staff, etc. from various universities also had the same kind of issues as students do today. They had to work, take care of children, pay bills, etc.

However, now days it seems as though things have changed as it pertains to the younger generation of students (not all but many). There are many complaints about the various life responsibilities and the excuses they provide to professors etc. for not meeting standards. This includes turning in assignments on time, being late to class, posting to online discussions after the thread has closed and the list goes on. Some students indicate to their professors that their dog consumed (ate) their homework assignments etc.

There is, evidently, as aforementioned, a need for further research pertaining to the performance of military and civilian students alike. It is likely that civilian students far outnumber veteran students at institutions of higher learning. That being said, further research especially as it pertains to the ratio of civilian students compared to the ratio of student veterans should be clearly defined well enough to form a more in-depth hypothesis. Although, a specific outcome is not necessarily predictable at any given time. It should continue to be a subject of public interest. Various research methods could obviously produce various results.

The perseverance of those civilian students who strive to maintain high academic standards and performance should never go unnoticed or overlooked. Perhaps if one were to study only civilian students and then categorize those students. There could be an implication of possible significant differences between standards and performance among the various civilian categorized groups. Time and change is inevitable and so it would be logical to conclude that the subject matter should be continuously researched and kept up to date.

Using deductive reasoning, the following connection between what a veteran learns and experiences in the military, will show that they are more likely to outperform many of their civilian counterparts in academic performance at UCF, specifically pertaining to academic GPAs. It should be noted there are some civilian students who maintain high GPA's.

***H<sub>1</sub>:** Veteran students are more likely to have higher overall GPA scores than the GPA scores of nonveteran students in higher education institutions.*

***H<sub>2</sub>:** Veteran students are more likely to have higher graduation rates than nonveteran students in higher education institutions.*

Research pertaining to the aforementioned hypotheses will be conducted in a general manner. It is obvious that there is no guaranteed specific outcome for either of the two hypotheses. A detailed careful analysis will be essential to producing results based off maintaining strict integrity. This study seeks to eliminate any possible fundamental attribution errors. It is also to be understood that data pertaining to correlation coefficients via quantitative aggregate data that proper mathematical calculations maintain absolute accuracy as provided.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Data Collection**

To test whether veteran undergraduate students have higher grade point averages than non-veterans undergraduate students at UCF, data was collected from UCF's Institutional Knowledge Management. Overall student GPAs, overall non-veteran GPAs, and overall veteran GPAs were compared. The dependent variable in this study is levels of academic performance by GPA. This is a continuous variable measured on a 4-point scale. It moves from poor academic performance (0.0) to high levels of academic performance (4.0). There are two independent variables in this study: veteran and non-veteran students. The veterans covered stem from the U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force, and the U.S. Navy. The age of veterans range from 17 to 90. Some veterans were those who served in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan and those who served during peacetime as well as the Vietnam War, Korean War, and World War II.

The collection of data came from the UCF Office of Institutional Knowledge Management (IKM). The aggregate data for GPA scores was broken down into fall semesters starting from fall 2013 and including data from fall 2014, 2015, 2016, and fall 2017. The aggregate data for graduation rates was broken down into five academic years containing cohorts starting with the 2008-2009 academic year and ending in the 2012-2013 academic year. This data included transfer undergraduate students who graduate by years four and six. IKM noted that they only included transfer students in their graduation rate data because most veteran students come in as transfer students. Additionally, it should be noted that the graduation rate data only includes students who self-identify as a veteran.

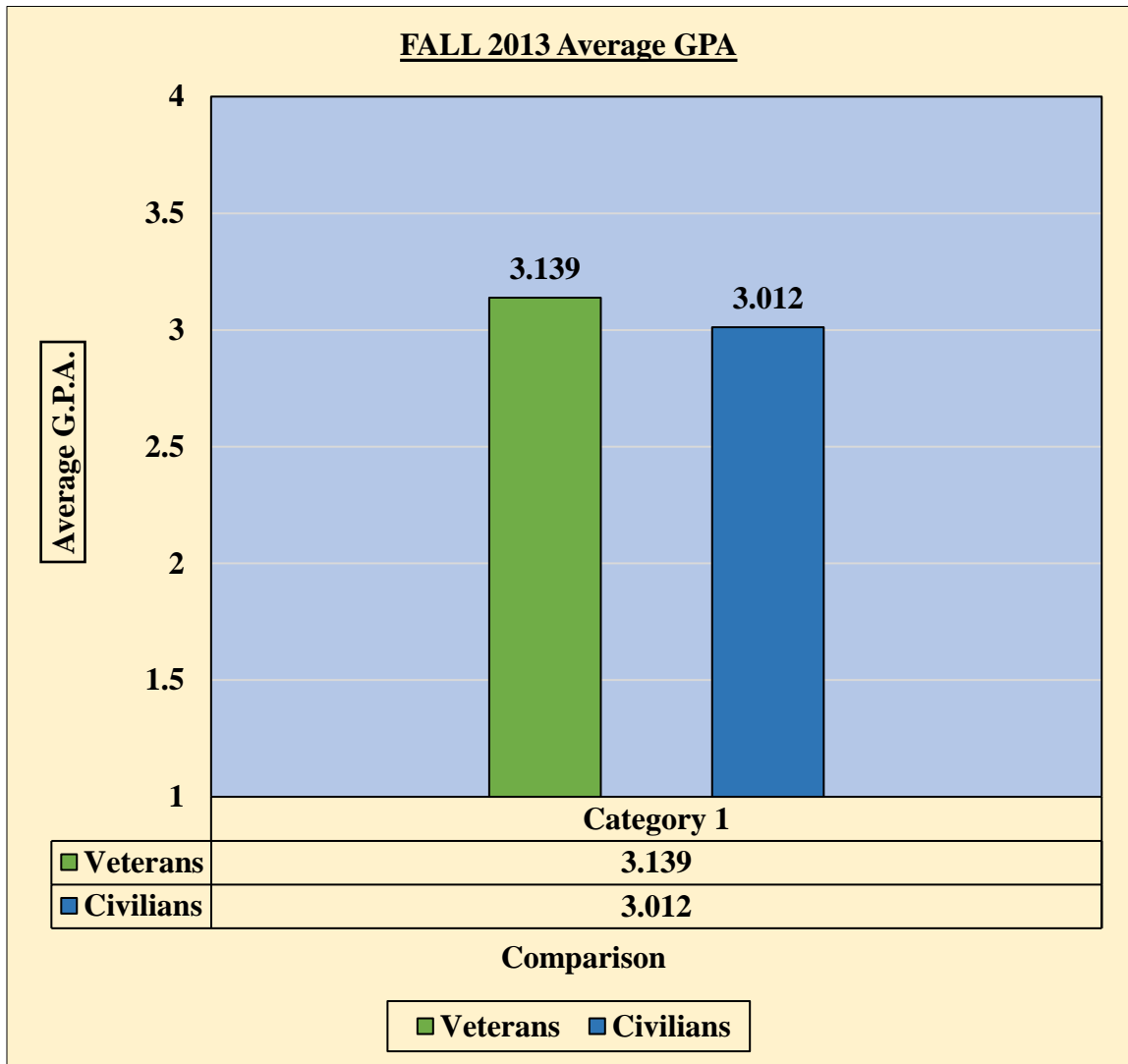
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A general overview of the data revealed mixed results.  $H_1$  was supported by the data, but  $H_2$  was not supported by the data. For the GPA data, the study shown in table one is not all inclusive for the fact that it does not contain specific grade point averages for spring and summer semester during the aforementioned years. However, the data provided is enough to draw a general conclusion that it is plausible to suggest that in fact veterans could very well maintain a higher-grade point average to some extent.

As it is clearly noticeable that this study was not an in-depth analysis. However, it was a preview that provided enough evidence to suggest further research is needed. The various cohorts lacked specific details pertaining to various factors within each cohort. So, this is something that needs to be taken into consideration and is not all inclusive. When reviewing the various tables, it can be concluded that while some differences are small they are none the less extremely important. In a sense, figuratively speaking it could be stated that this study is likened to the start of a map towards educational progression. Several key factors will need to be taken into consideration. The study provided a much-needed emphasis on performance and standards.

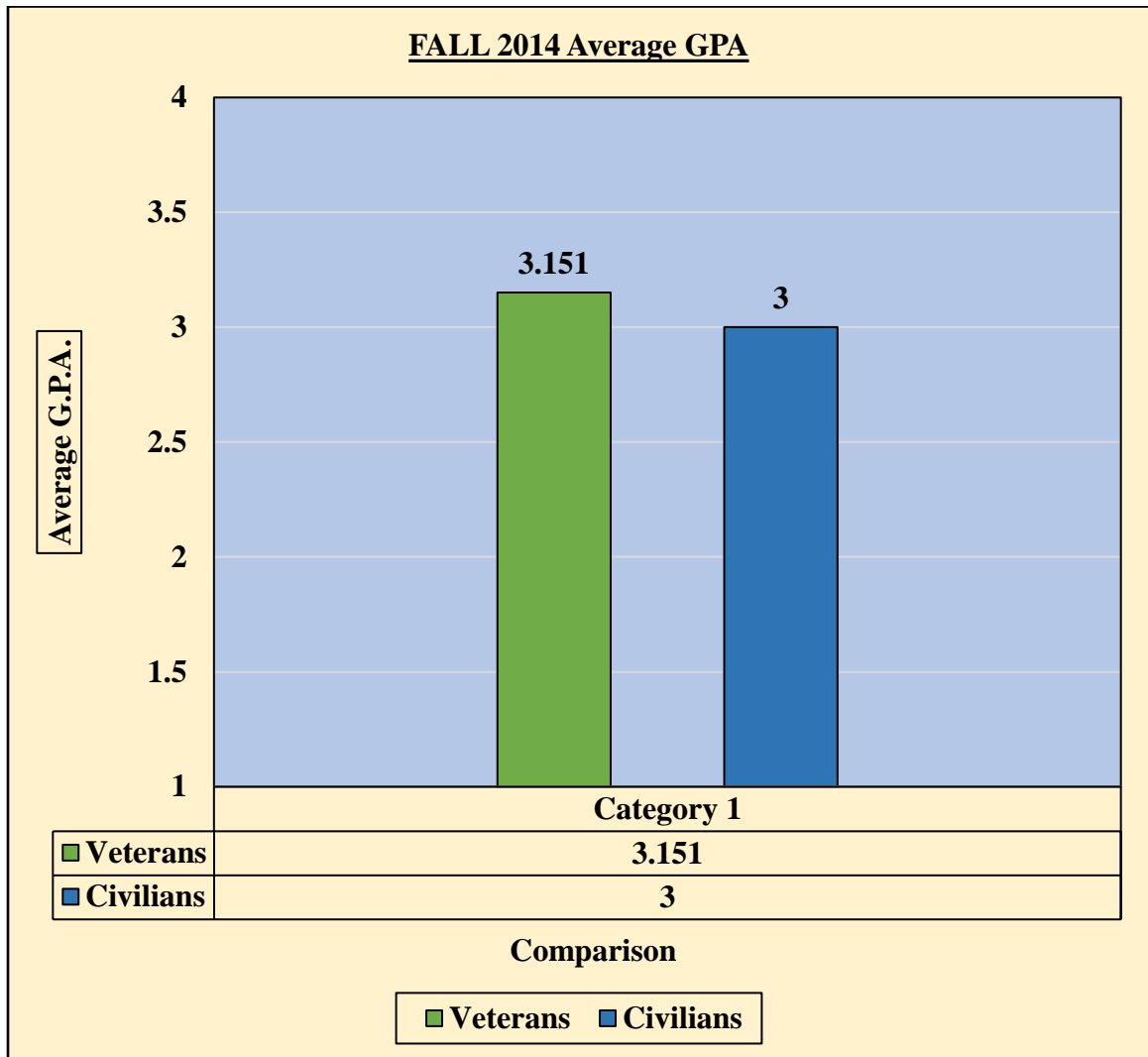
It must be important to notice key grade point averages regardless of how significant the difference. The following tables will be developed by utilizing methods of combined analysis pertaining to aggregate data to show an overall quantitative graph combining the entire five-year span for every fall semester from fall 2013 to fall 2017. Fall 2013 showed a differential of: **0.127**

**Table 1: Fall 2013 Average GPA**



The table below (or next page) shows the differential in grade point average for the fall of 2014. While it may not seem like there is a noticeable significant difference the evidence provided speaks for its self. Utilizing aggregate data from the University of Central - Florida Institutional Knowledge Management the following results for the fall of 2014 showed a differential of: **0.151**.

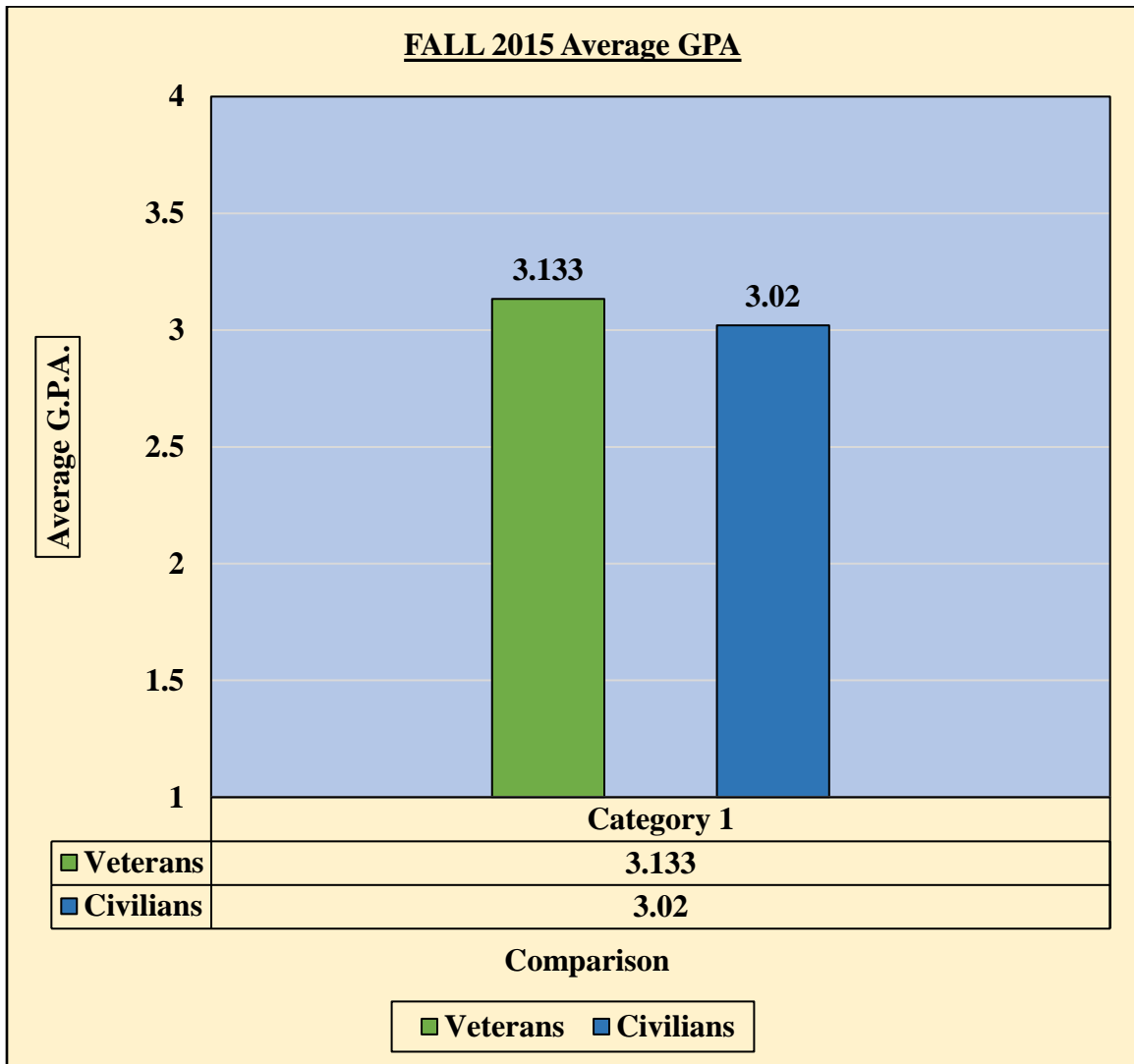
**Table 2: Fall 2014 Average GPA**



The table below (or next page) shows the differential in grade point average for the fall of 2015. While it may not seem like there is a noticeable significant difference the evidence provided speaks for its self. Utilizing aggregate data from the University of Central Florida - Institutional Knowledge Management the following results for the fall of 2015 showed a differential of: **0.113**

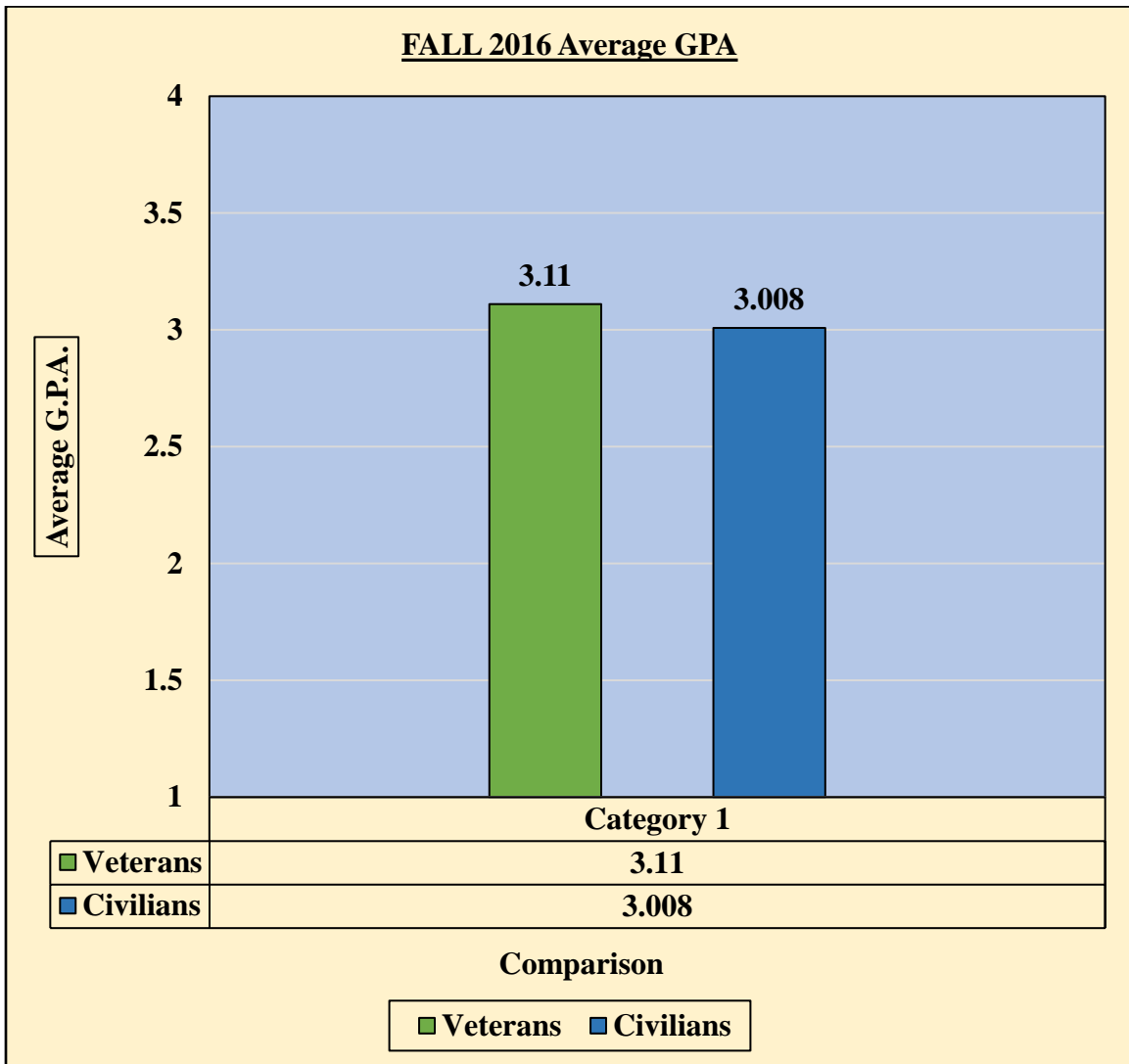


**Table 3: Fall 2015 Average GPA**



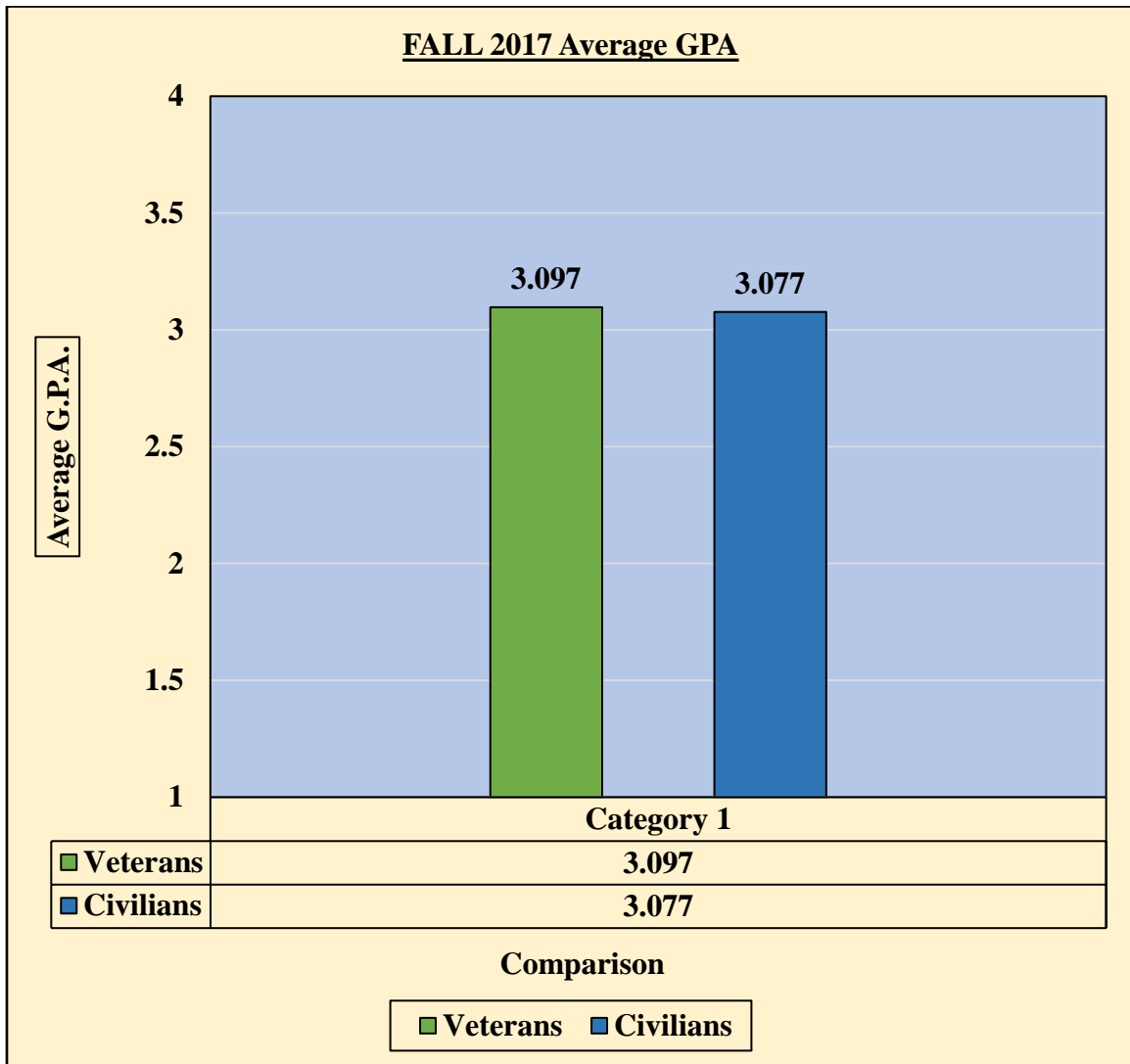
The table below (or next page) shows the differential in grade point average for the fall of 2016. While it may not seem like there is a noticeable significant difference the evidence provided speaks for its self. Utilizing aggregate data from the University of Central Florida - Institutional Knowledge Management the following results for the fall of 2016 showed a differential of: **0.102**

**Table 4: Fall 2016 Average GPA**



The table below (or next page) shows the differential in grade point average for the fall of 2017. While it may not seem like there is a noticeable significant difference the evidence provided speaks for its self. Utilizing aggregate data from the University of Central Florida - Institutional Knowledge Management the following results for the fall of 2017 showed a differential of: **0.02**

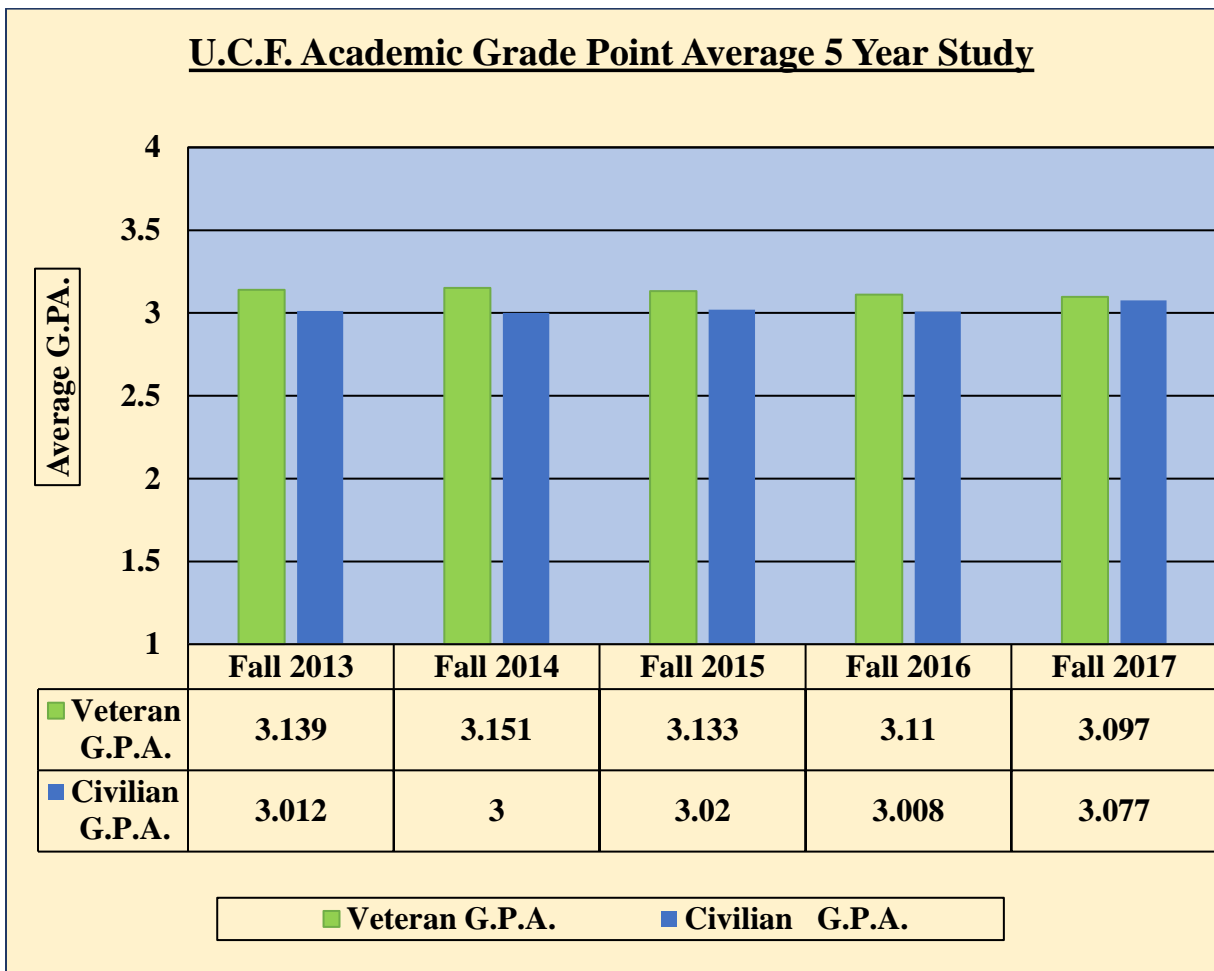
**Table 5: Fall 2017 Average GPA**



The following table is important in that when combining the provided aggregate data it was noticed that there could be a possible trend. It showed the potential for the development of a future project containing the breakdown of various categories pertaining to cause and effect. It could also contribute to a process of elimination. This is something that could provide invaluable data and could also contribute to the development of a new study designed to give a more in-depth look at the specific factors and how these factors may benefit from factor manipulation.

As the study shown in table one is not all inclusive for the fact that it does not contain specific grade point averages for spring and summer semester during the aforementioned years. However, the data provided is enough to draw a general conclusion that it is plausible to suggest that in fact veterans could very well maintain a higher-grade point average to some extent. The following table will be developed by utilizing methods of combined analysis pertaining to aggregate data to show an overall quantitative graph combining the entire five-year span for every fall semester from fall 2013 to fall 2017.

**Table 6: UCF Five Year GPAs**



## **Graduation Rates and Graduating with Honors**

The significance of all course work completed by a student and making it to the day of graduation is no slight feat. The unforgiving consequences of not making it to the end can be detrimental in one's life. The determining factors that ultimately led to the student's success will likely continue to be utilized and expanded upon for the rest of one's life. Completion of a student's academic career is not only benefiting the student but also helping society as well. As it pertains to veterans, who served their country honorably, the day of graduation only reinforces their previous attributes learned within the military. This undoubtedly leads to their success.

The rates of graduation vary among colleges and universities. However, standards within these various institutions are to be taken into consideration when developing statistical data regarding the percentage of graduation rates. Without accurate empirical (non-biased) data, the ultimate results regarding graduation percentage rates for each institution will be inconclusive. (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

It is evident that while not all-inclusive, students who understood the significance of discipline, time management, etc. were more inclined to make it to graduation. It is logical to suggest that institutions of higher learning could gain more knowledge by conducting continuous research pertaining to graduation rates. It is of great importance to include the ever-changing academic issues that student veterans and civilians alike face that affect graduation rates. As political debates about education continue they should be unbiased and in the best interests of society. As to the outcomes of political policy that may or may not affect post-secondary institutions, society should hope for the best.

The ultimate purpose, in general, should be to assist students in attaining the best education possible. However, at what point does society say enough is enough about the lowering of standards and the quality of post-secondary education? One would think there should already be enough oversight to combat the lowering of such standards. The term “diploma mills” seems to be ambiguous. It is a term that has become synonymous with poor education standards and the giving out of degrees because of radical political ideologies. In essence, it could be stated that it is also synonymous with the phrase “participation trophy” mentality. Or in other words you can participate but “...that failure is an option” (Ray, 2015, p.1).

Essentially this has come to fruition because of the subject matter regarding social equity. In other word's just because certain people (regardless of one’s ethnic, religious, social status, etc. background) continuously makes poor choices in life. This especially pertains to poor decision-making processes, consequently standards have become politicized. Thus, the lowering of standards is a direct result. According to some academic scholars and members of society they too (those who make poor choices etc. in life) should not be left out and should be provided lower standards to obtain an associate’s, bachelor’s, master's degree, etc.

Society should use clear and concise logical reasoning regarding academic standards. Society should strive to raise those standards, not lower standards for unfortunate citizens who are intellectually incapable of meeting and maintaining necessary high standards. To lower standards for financial gain for any reason what so ever, should be considered an act of blatant disregard for moral and ethical oversight. It appears times have changed and currency and admissions inflation has quickly become the priority not the significance of maintaining high

standards and performance. There are of course exceptions to those as mentioned earlier; such as those with legitimate disabilities. After all, the ultimate purpose of accepting potential student applicants is making sure they can progress and graduate. Academic admissions are aware of exceptions. There are no guarantees as to the outcome of requested exceptions.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the following Statistics contain specific key data regarding that of veterans and the graduation rates of combatants/vets and civilians alike. The following from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017 indicates: That the graduation rates for four-year institutions granting bachelor's degree are presented by considering first-time, full-time undergraduate students. It contains specific detailed information pertaining to those students who started seeking a four-year degree at four-year institutions universities. The statistics were provided for the fall year of 2009, and the average graduation percentage rate was that of 59 percent. The fifty-nine percent was specific to those who started in fall 2009 and graduated in 2015 at the same institution. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017)

Those students that are disabled for whatever reason should have access to a level playing field (so to speak). A prime example is that which has occurred at the University of Central Florida. While the subject of graduating with honors such as Summa Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude, and Cum Laude are attainable for some students they may not be for others because of the effects of documented lawfully recognized disabilities. A prime example is that of a student who for instance, in their freshman or sophomore years had a major disability that affected their grades in specific classes. So, this should be carefully reviewed for the fact that while the student

may have done very well in some of their classes during the same semester it should be taken into careful consideration as to why he or she did not do so well in a specific class during that semester. The future academic policies pertaining to the subject matter are of great importance.

Questions should be asked pertaining to how does/did the students disabilities affect his or her academic performance in certain classes. An example might be that a student did very well in a writing class but did not do so well in a math class. Another example would be that a student who is now a junior or senior may be doing very well now but did not do so well in certain classes during their freshman or sophomore semesters do to disabilities.

The point being made is that the student that is now a junior or senior attaining all “A’s” will not be able to attain graduation honors such as Summa Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude, or Cum Laude. The university policy implementers should take into careful consideration how a disability may fluctuate in terms of progression or regression during a student’s academic career. As it pertains to those qualifications needed to attain such honors mentioned. If a student’s records show clear and concise empirical evidence that he or she has been improving significantly by obtaining professional medical help. Then there should be a pathway to attain such academic honors. After all, and all things considered, are disabled students not honorable?

However, again, one thing that has become apparent is the mentioned lack of fair and equal access to attain graduation honors. What is evident is that a case by case basis is needed pertaining to the past classes taken and the specific affect it currently has on a student’s being able to attain graduation honors. With time, must come support and change. At the University of



Central Florida policy changes appear to be reviewed on a regular basis as needed to keep up which the ever-changing needs of students and the academic environment.

The complexity of issues is without a doubt enormous. Trying to foresee futuristic problematic issues is an ongoing task that requires continuous oversight. These tasks will need the experience of dedicated faculty, staff, and other employees from all departments. With unity there can be great progress made that will be beneficial to all and reflect greatly upon the university. The process will take time. However, positive outcomes will surely be the end result.

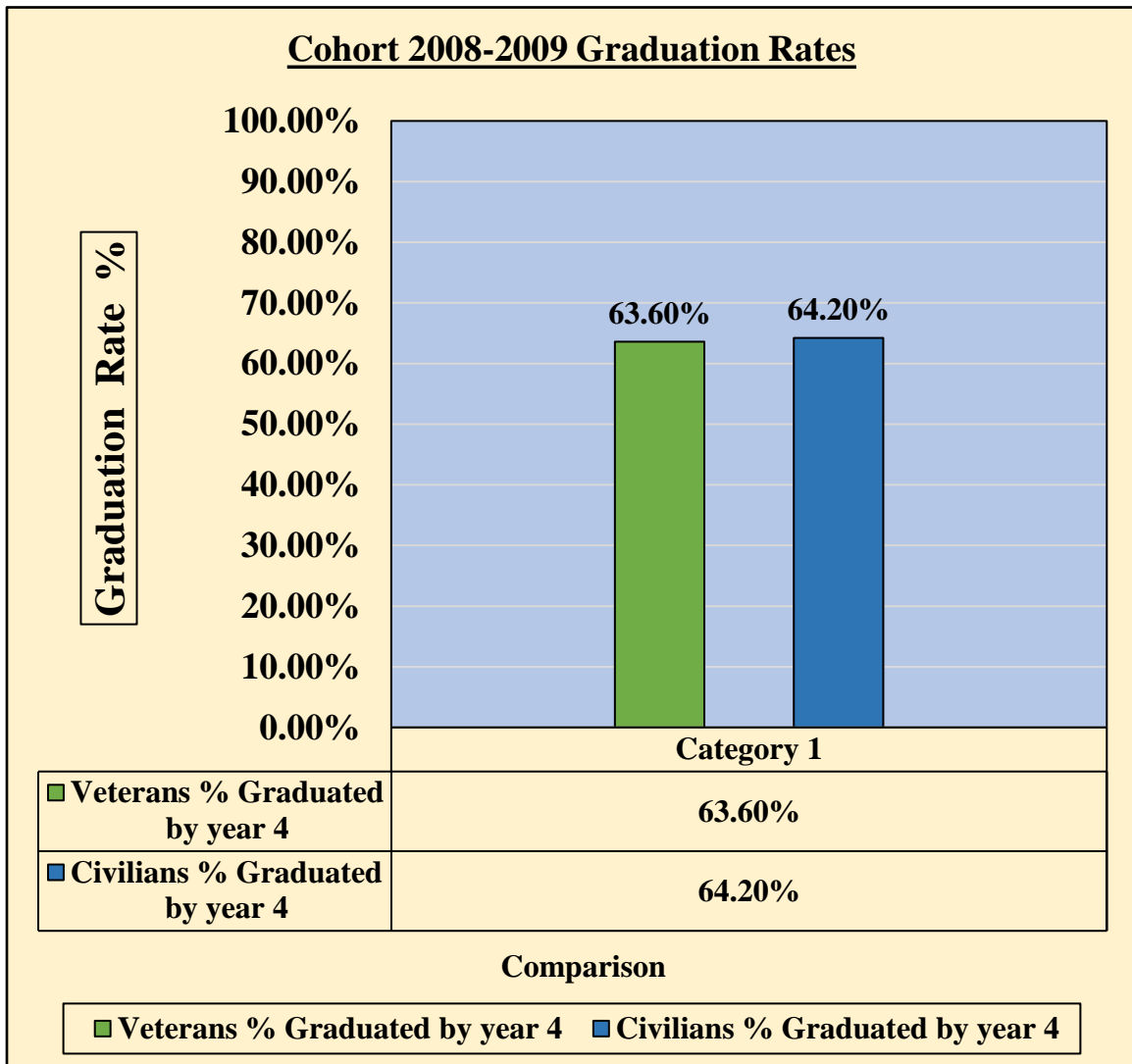
As for the graduation rates for veterans at colleges and universities careful attention must be given to the subject of transfer students. Many veterans more than likely have attended various institutions of higher learning. As veterans have very likely traveled numerous times during their time in the military. Moving will obviously show that as it pertains to veterans that this has a significant effect on graduation rates of veterans. In fact, a review and comparison between that of civilian graduations rates and veteran graduation rates from the University of Central Florida – Institutional Knowledge Management using aggregate data showed specific cohorts graduation rates for each year between 2008 through 2013.

A general overview of the subject matter was assessed. Utilizing aggregate data, the following was found not to be supportive of hypothesis two (H2). Quantitative information that was synthesized and analyzed found that data collected from the University of Central Florida's Institutional Knowledge Management indicated a difference pertaining to graduation rates between that of veteran students and civilian students. Civilians had higher graduation rates.

The study of aggregate data from the University of Central Florida's – Institutional Knowledge Management shown in the following tables are a general overview. The following tables are representative of yearly undergraduate cohorts starting in 2008 through 2013.

Graduation rates for the cohort of 2008 to 2009 showed a differential of: **.06**

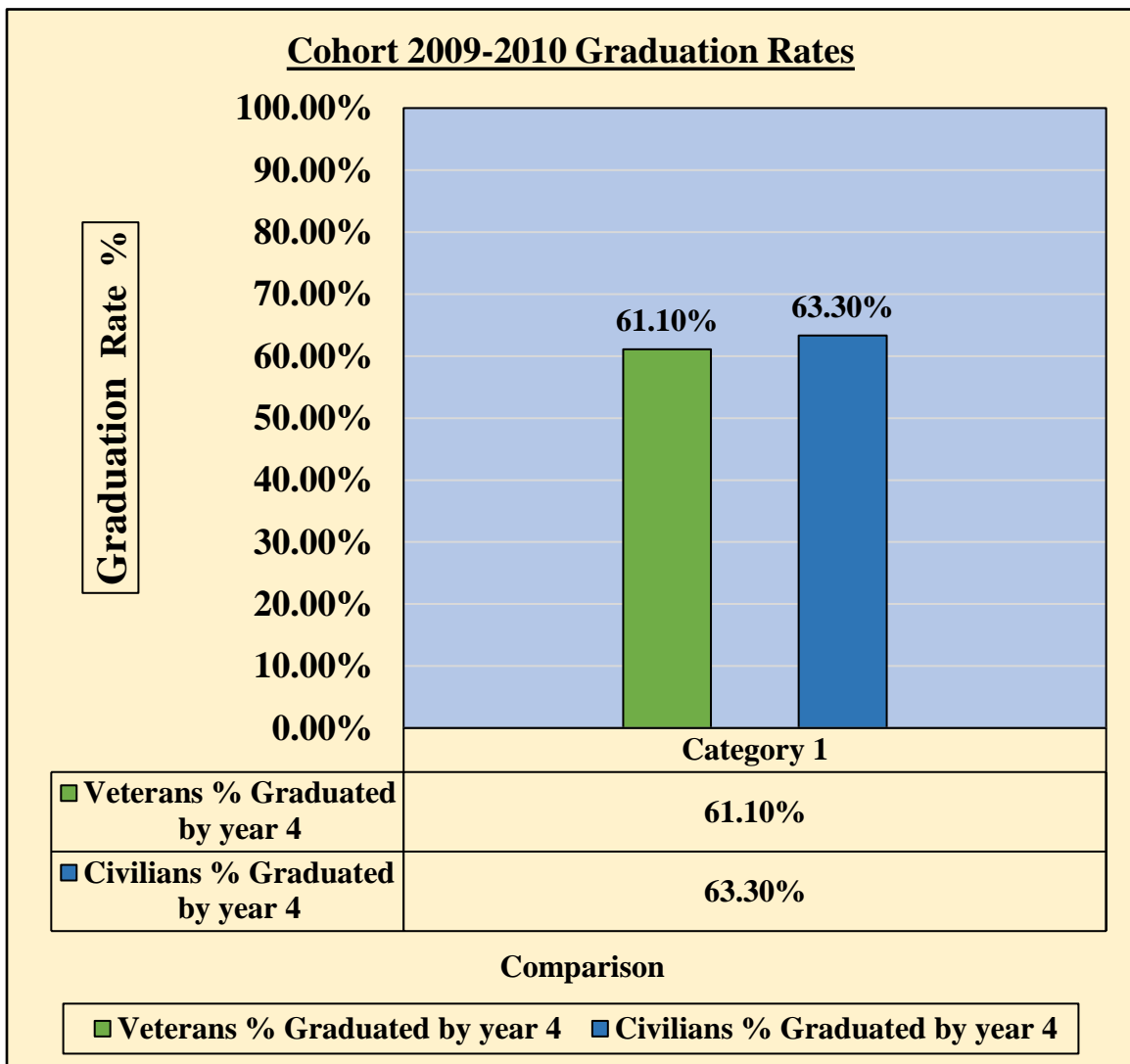
**Table 7: 2008-2009 Cohort Graduation Rates**



The study of aggregate data from the University of Central Florida's – Institutional Knowledge Management shown in the following tables are a general overview. The following tables are representative of yearly undergraduate cohorts starting in 2008 through 2013.

Graduation rates for the cohort of 2009 to 2010 showed a differential of: **2.2%**

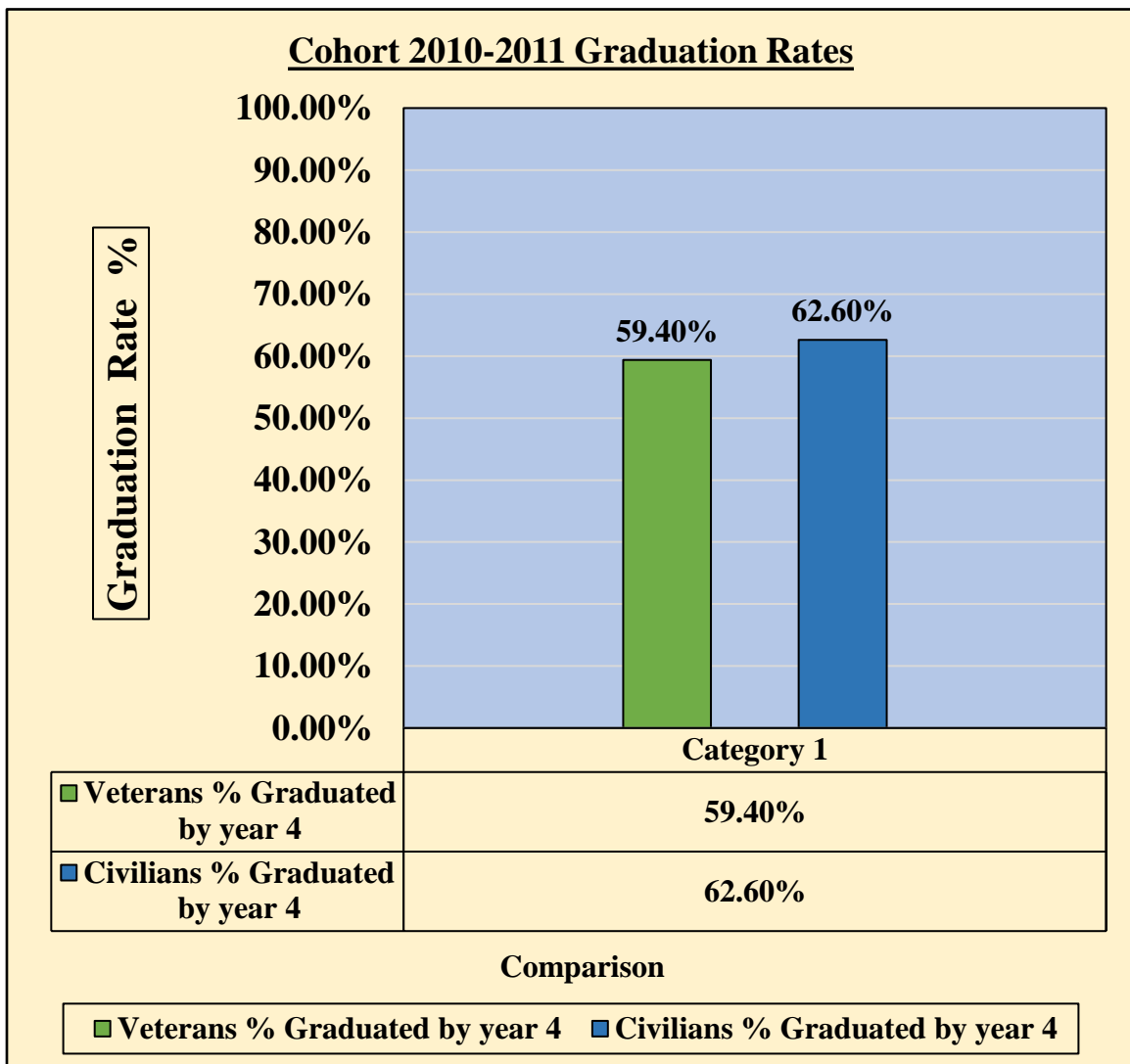
**Table 8: 2009-2010 Cohort Graduation Rates**



The study of aggregate data from the University of Central Florida's – Institutional Knowledge Management shown in the following tables are a general overview. The following tables are representative of yearly undergraduate cohorts starting in 2008 through 2013.

Graduation rates for the cohort of 2010 to 2011 showed a differential of: **3.2%**

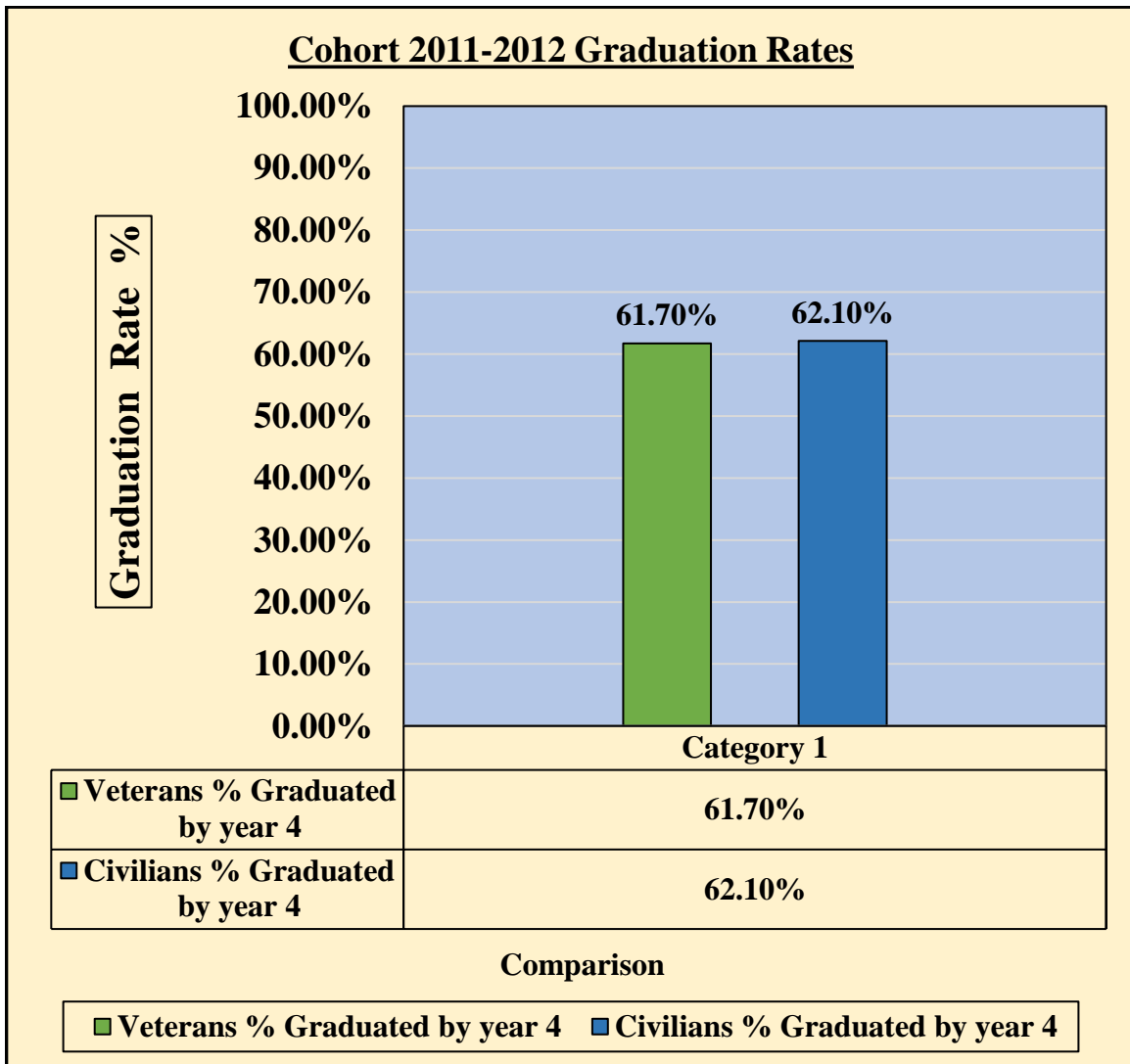
**Table 9: 2010-2011 Cohort Graduation Rates**



The study of aggregate data from the University of Central Florida's – Institutional Knowledge Management shown in the following tables are a general overview. The following tables are representative of yearly undergraduate cohorts starting in 2008 through 2013.

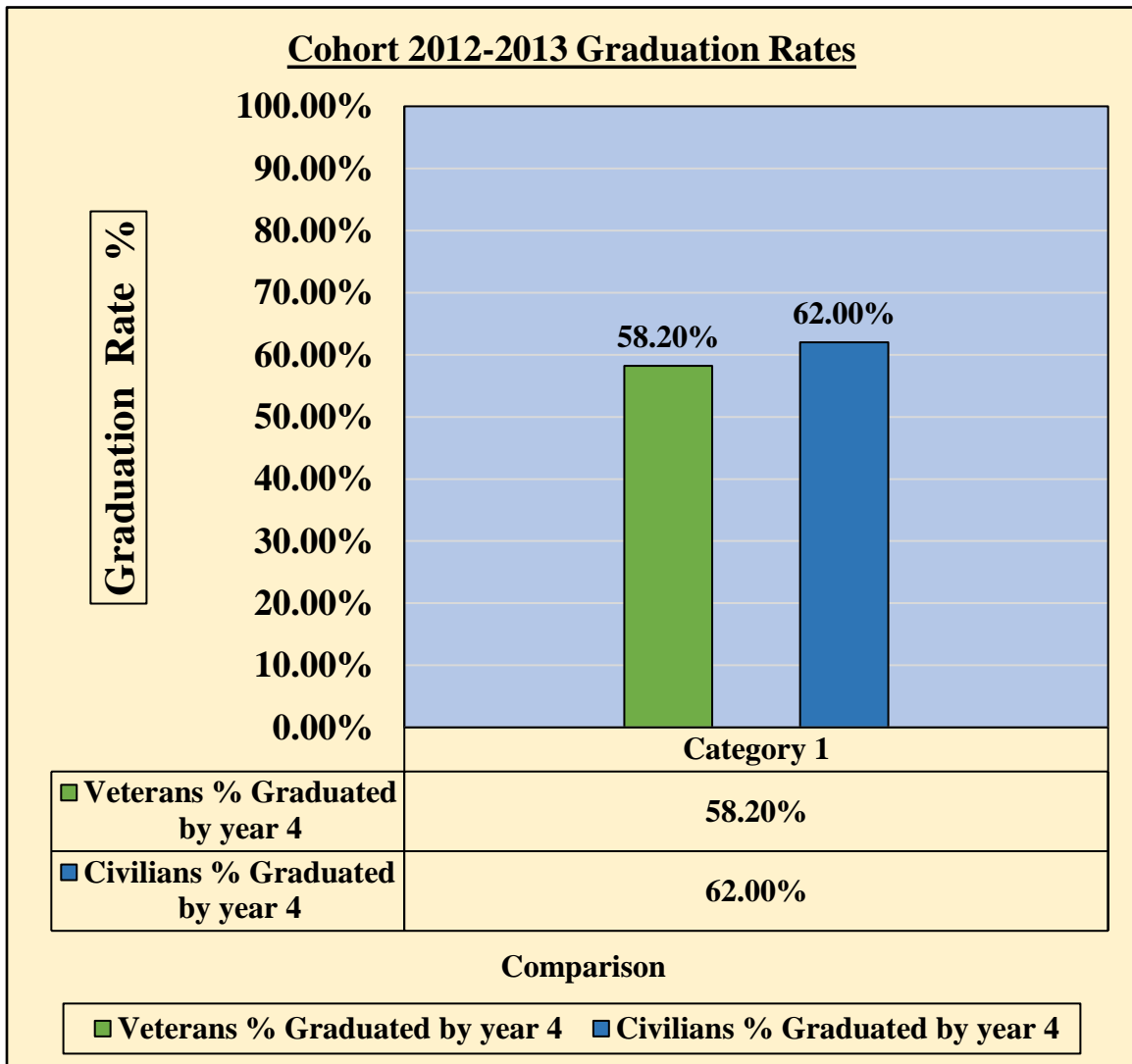
Graduation rates for the cohort of 2011 to 2012 showed a differential of: **.04%**

**Table 10: 2011-2012 Cohort Graduation Rates**



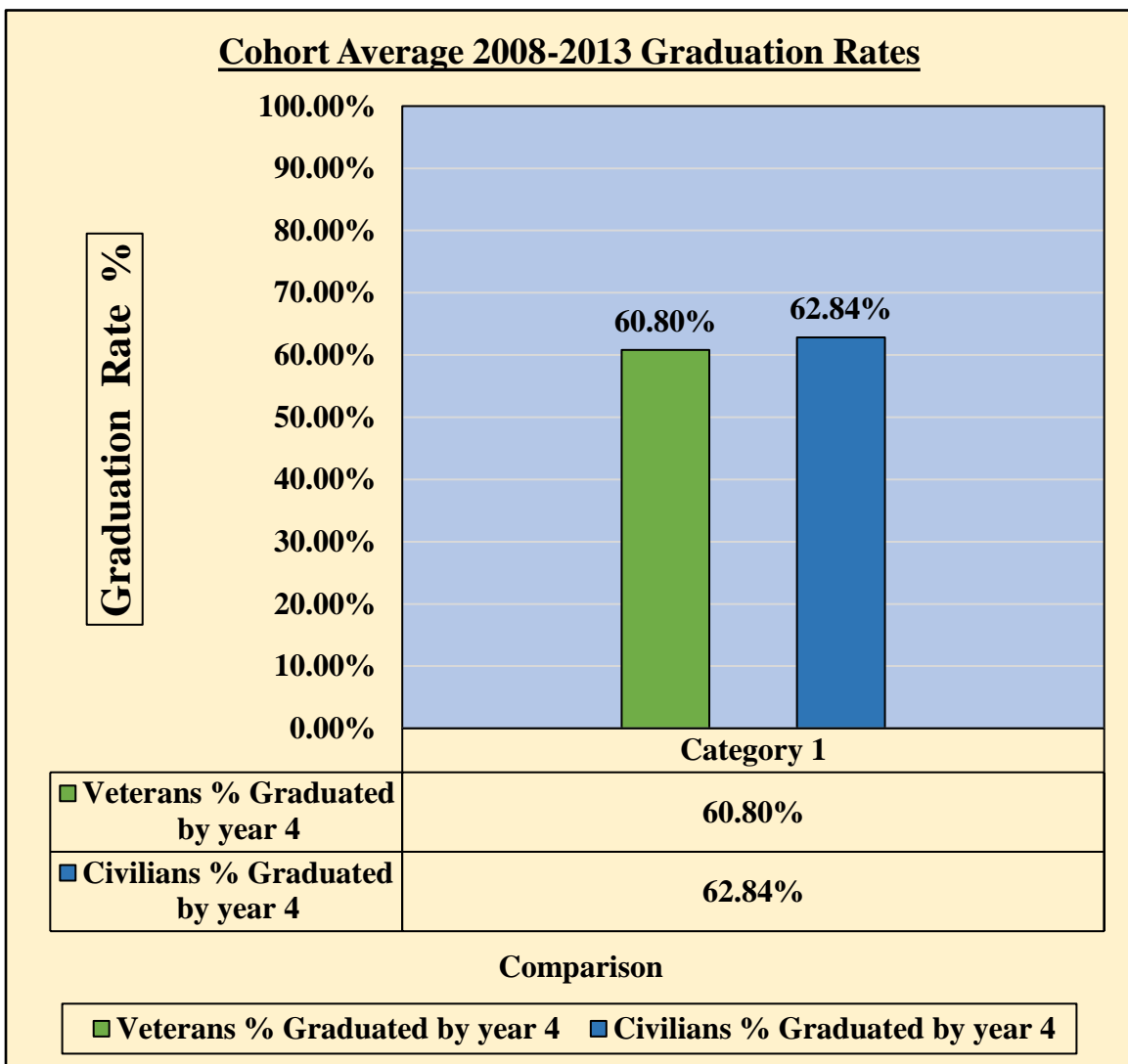
The study of aggregate data from the University of Central Florida's – Institutional Knowledge Management shown in the following tables are a general overview. The following tables are representative of yearly undergraduate cohorts starting in 2008 through 2013. Graduation rates for the cohort of 2012 to 2013 showed a differential of: **3.8%**

**Table 11: 2012-2013 Cohort Graduation Rates**



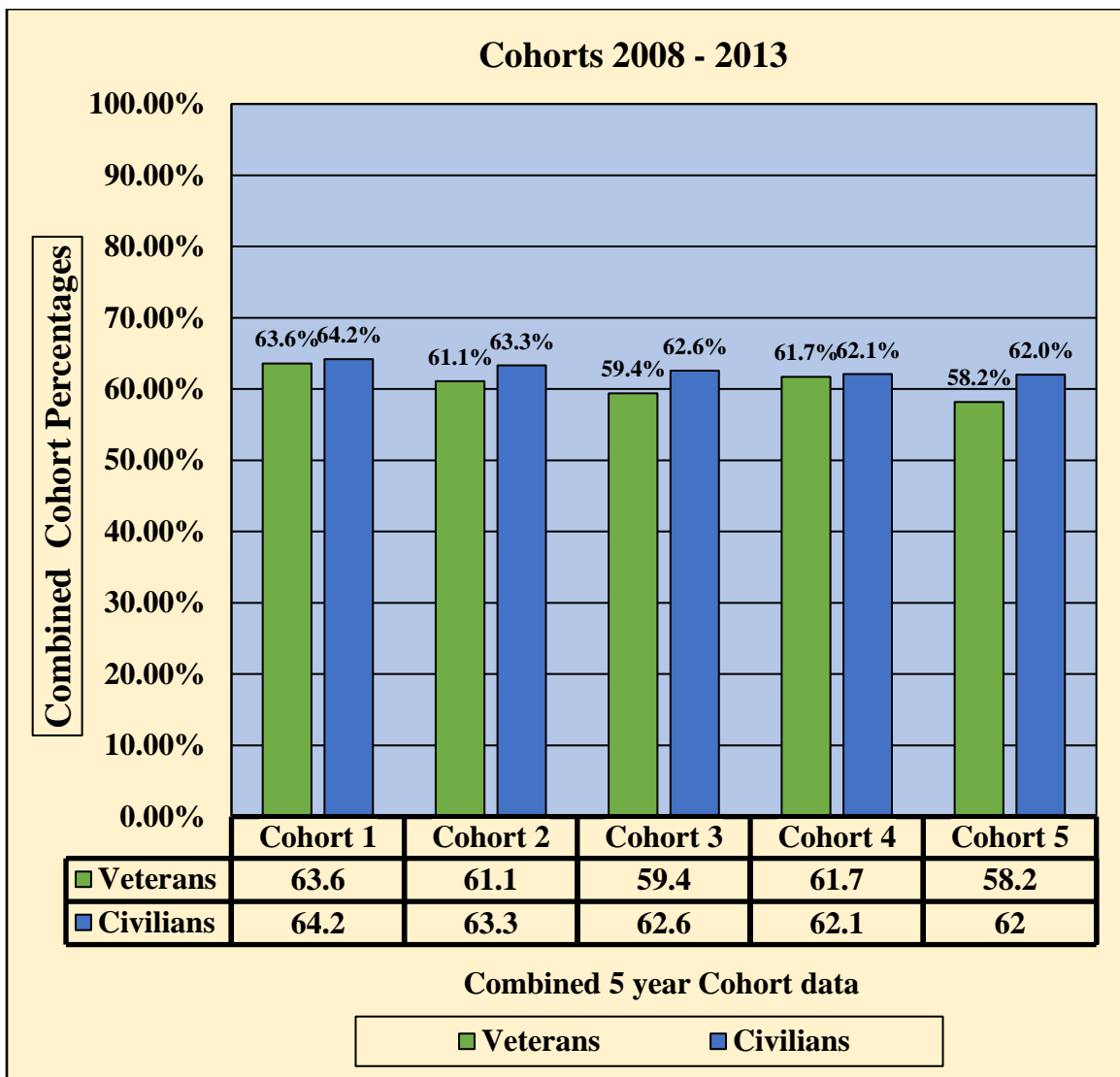
The study of aggregate data from the University of Central Florida's – Institutional Knowledge Management shown in the following table is a general overview. The following table is representative of yearly undergraduate cohorts starting in 2008 through 2013. Combined graduation rate average for cohorts between 2008 to 2013 showed a differential of: **2.04%**

**Table 12: 2008-2013 Cohort Graduation Rates**



The study of aggregate data from the University of Central Florida's – Institutional Knowledge Management shown in the following table is a general overview. The following table is representative of yearly undergraduate cohorts starting in 2008 through 2013. Combined graduation rate average for cohorts between 2008 to 2013 showed a differential of: **2.04%**

**Table 13: Combined Cohort Graduation 2008-2013**





## CONCLUSION

It is clear that the subject of standards and performance learned at institutions of higher learning will have a direct impact on the jobs/careers of graduates. Both civilians and veterans alike should work together and maintain the moral high ground pertaining to standards and performance. After all graduates are the future of a prosperous society. As it stands the economic and political struggles are ever present. Thus, the future of a better society is dependent upon intellectual knowledge gained from academic institutions.

Veterans are a great asset to society. They contribute significantly to the overall well-being and advancement of society. Though many are stereotyped in various ways. Veterans and civilians must come together and learn from each other. The American dream isn't just a punch line, it is an attainable reality. If society learns to put their differences aside no matter what they may be. Then a healing process can endure. At this time, American history has a chance to be rewritten to reflect the ever-changing needs of a successful society.

The moment of truth is upon all American citizens. Procrastination will only lead to more uncertainty and turmoil for what so many have fought and died for. Only to be forsaken and forgotten. Let not those service members who served so valiantly, who served for those who cared so little, if any at all, for the personal sacrifices of veterans who never made it home and who paid the ultimate sacrifice. The misconceptions of veterans seem to be the status quo. Veterans across the United States are coming together to combat the assumptions of many in society. However, there are many who understand the absolute significance of a quality education based on high moral standards and outstanding academic performance.

A veteran has gone through many different life-altering experiences whether it be in combat overseas or while locally stationed here in the United States. The sheer nature of the training conducted to prepare for combat is extremely life threatening as well. Many dangerous things can happen during training for combat. Often one might hear on the news in their local communities that a soldier or soldiers were killed during training exercises. The things that veterans have been through without a doubt have a profound effect on their future life experiences. Especially as it pertains to an academic setting. Time correlates to adaptation.

It is obvious to conclude that obtaining a degree in higher education is not intended to be an easy accomplishment in one's life. Transcripts grade point average is what potential employers will likely take interest in, to include academic honors. Previously mentioned, in part, is that of working students and the possible effects that work may have on a particular student's GPA. Some may believe that students who work could logically expect to have a lower GPA. However, this is not necessarily the case. Grade point averages and performance have many contributing factors that could impact both. The issues pertaining to the subject matter will be forever changing. In many ways it seems as though some in society couldn't care less.

The overall mission or goal would be to be proactive instead of reactive to the outcomes of poor educational standards. It is logical to suggest that when a negative trend in society is observed via factual based evidence, that it should be met with sheer determination to make the necessary changes for a positive outcome. Only time will tell. Sometimes it may seem as though the ignorant far outweigh the intellects. This is exactly what needs to change. Society must never give up and never give in. As it pertains to combating the lowering of academic GPA and performance. It will require team work and dedication unlike ever before seen.

### **Study Limitations**

It should be observed that there are various limitations pertaining to this study. Some of the following are but just a few limitations noted via brief overview. This study was conducted using a very limited amount of aggregate data obtained from the University of Central Florida – Institutional Knowledge Management. This study only included those veterans who self-identified as veterans. This study was limited by seeking to provide a brief overview of the subject matter with the clear understating that further detailed research would need to be conducted on a continuous basis.

This study was limited by the amount of interest by academic scholars and different departments and their personnel. While there were a few scholars who contributed greatly to the subject of study, it was evident that more scholars, veterans, and official military personnel were needed to take up interest and contribute to the overall subject matter.

So, with that being taken into consideration there may be other veterans attending the University of Central Florida that could potentially have manipulated the data provided. It should also be noted, that in fact, the general overview was not significantly detailed as it pertains to breaking down the different types of students within each category i.e. veterans students and civilian students. These are limited results that could certainly have provided a more thorough and detailed collective analysis contributing to a more focused break down with more categories.

The various veteran sections of the study were carried out using a combined analysis without taking into consideration things such as the levels of academic performance pertaining to different age groups of veterans (different generations of veterans) different types of life plans,

goals, personal life circumstances, disabilities, legal issues etc. The various civilian sections of the study were carried out using a combined analysis without taking into consideration the various types of students with different academic goals, personal life circumstances, financial stability, effects of disabilities and how many students that were attending who actually had disabilities that could have affected their performance etc.

The study had very limited information as it pertains to possibilities that contributed to civilian students having higher graduation rates when compared to the graduation rates of veterans. Some possible reasons that veterans had slightly lower graduation rates were: being called up to perform active duty, being deployed to combat, being ordered to change duty stations, in service medical injuries etc.

This study was limited only to research conducted pertaining to the University of Central Florida. This study was intended to conduct a brief overview of data pertaining to various cohorts of students and their correlations to grade point averages and academic performance. Limitations pertaining to those who self-identified themselves as veterans should also be taken into consideration. The more veterans that self-identify the more accurate the results.

The limitations should also include those who lack interest in the subject matter. If scholars and society in general show no interest, then it will most certainly affect the outcome of any future research. This study needed more than aggregate data. However, with what limited data that was provided it did provide enough empirical information to warrant future expanded research. There are likely other limitations to this study but enough to draw a general preview.

## **Future Research**

There are many different aspects as it pertains to conducting future research. A few of the most important aspects are that the research being conducted should in no way be politicized in any manner at any time. Another important aspect is that of maintaining integrity of research being conducted. As in life there are always exceptions to the rule and this also applies to any research being conducted. So, with great attention to detail an accurate research data base could be introduced and provide useful information. This information could very well result in specific developments of algorithms to assist in the assessment of academic performance and standards.

Data mining will need to be conducted on a continuous basis as time and issues are ever changing. It would be logical to suggest that various data mining techniques should be used. The various data mining techniques should be studied on a case by case basis. Future research should include a clear breakdown of how academic performance and academic standards are evolving over time. How they affect one another. Research should be conducted pertaining to each individual institution of higher learning. At the various institutions there should be further break down regarding the individual colleges and schools within those individual colleges and further break down to each individual class.

Research should be started at the specific major level and proceed from that specific major to each individual class and professor of specific class within the specific major. From that point each professor should be researched as to how they conduct their individual classes. Specific institutional access granting will need to be obtained in order to attain an accurate study. Each institutional review board will need to be consulted. If institutional access is granted to

conduct specific research, then specific steps are to be taken in order to conduct an accurate study. Research access pertaining to the subject matter could meet significant resistance.

The future research of academic performance and standards will undoubtedly start at the class room level. Special attention should be given to any observance of political agendas by specific professors. Political motives are extremely dangerous for the fact that they could have astronomical effects on the quality of education. Grade inflation must be carefully observed as this is in direct correlation to political agendas and institutional quotas. Grade inflation could also implicate a direct correlation to job or career security of some professors.

The following is another way of conducting research. The academic performance of students should be broken down into various categories. Students could be categorized by things such as age, maturity level, financial background, social background, family background, criminal background, work ethic, disabilities, etc. However, it should always be considered that any sensitive information research conducted, has been approved by specific institutions- Institutional Review Board. However, if approval is granted by the I.R.B. than valuable data could lead to positive improvements to both academic performance and standards.

Future research will need to be adaptive to ever changing environments and circumstances. Future research should be conducted utilizing the knowledge of academic scholars in conjunction with veterans and federal and state agencies. Research should be conducted via synthesizing and analyzing combined analysis from both civilian and government sectors of the U.S. population. Together, utilizing logical deductive reasoning will benefit all.

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