



Journal of Veterans Studies

Student Veterans' Participation in High-Impact Practices: Veterans' Experiences at Three Institutions of Higher Education in Southeastern North Carolina

Jon Kapell, Jess Boersma, James DeVita, & Michele Parker

Abstract

This qualitative study explores student veteran engagement in educational practices the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) identifies as High-Impact Practices (HIPs). This is a result of a university-wide systematic study on how to enhance equitably HIPs for all students at the authors' institution, later broadening to encompass three institutions in North Carolina of varying size and mission: (a) Mid-sized Regional University (MRU), a comprehensive regional university; (b) State Community College (SCC), a two-year public institution located within 10 miles of MRU; and (c) Small College, a small, private liberal arts college. Fourteen student veterans were interviewed about their perceptions of, and participation in, HIPs. We found that common Intellectual Experiences, Writing Intensive Courses, Collaborative Assignments, and Diversity/Global Learning modalities were the HIPs most utilized. Additionally, three themes emerged: mission-orientation, competing priorities, and marketing to student veteran populations. Although contextualized within the state of North Carolina, implications and recommendations from the current study provide meaningful insights for both practice and further research on student veterans.

Keywords: student veterans, high-impact practices, student engagement, barriers

Introduction

Currently, there are over 800,000 student veterans in institutions of higher education in the United States (Vacchi, 2012) and this number is expected to exceed a million in the next ten years (Lipka, 2011). Key categorical differences in student veterans exist based on service status, such as whether a student veteran is on active duty status, a veteran, or a reservist. Another key difference among student veterans is that a large number have not experienced combat conditions (Mulhere, 2014), while those who have served in combat may have experienced difficult life situations (Cole, 2013). Additionally, many student veterans have incurred injuries and functional limitations that influence their college participation (Burnett & Segoria, 2009; Lipka, 2011), and identify themselves as student veterans, while other student veterans may choose not to identify themselves as such to higher education support services (e.g., Vacchi, 2012). In other words, student veterans are a unique and diverse population in higher education (Cole, 2013; Mulhere, 2014). As such, the term "student veteran" can, at the same time, serve as a useful category for a shared identity tied to military service, but also unintentionally cover over the fact that the term encompasses many subpopulations with wide-ranging educational needs, life experiences, and expectations. Hence, academic and co-curricular initiatives can start with a focus on undergraduate student veterans (Vacchi, 2012), but with the understanding that strategies to improve student veteran success might be most effective when aligned with targeted and prioritized resource allocations.

The probability and impact of student veterans having a role in higher education in North Carolina is high, as the state is home to two major military bases: Fort Bragg

(Fayetteville) and Camp Lejeune (Jacksonville). There are 11,309 student veterans at community colleges, 6,374 student veterans throughout the public University of North Carolina (UNC) system campuses and 4,168 student veterans at private colleges/universities in North Carolina alone (US Department of Veteran Affairs, cited in North Carolina Support Network for Student Veterans, n.d.). Given the increasingly significant scale of student veterans, it is vital that higher education acquire a more robust picture of these students by gaining an understanding of their educational experiences, specific needs, and goals. In doing so, we may learn how certain practices hinder student veterans' participation in experiences designed to enhance their education. Using this information, faculty and staff can identify ways to better serve this population and further increase educational outcomes. Although there is a good body of empirical research and literature on student veterans, there is more limited information on how educational experiences such as internships and undergraduate research opportunities contribute to their success or what barriers limit veteran access to HIPs. This study looks to help construct a more solid foundation in this area by exploring student veteran engagement in HIPs at three institutions of higher education in North Carolina.

Relevant Literature

In this literature review we cover student veterans as well as HIPs. This is followed by literature on factors crucial to student veteran engagement: student veterans' faculty connections within classroom settings, (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Osborne, 2013), persistence to graduation, (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Renn & Reason, 2012; St. John, Daun-Barnett, Moronski-Chapman, & Routledge, 2013), and the role of administration in aiding student veterans' progress towards graduation (Evans, Pellegrino, & Hoggan, 2015; Wilson, 2014).

Student Veterans Profile and Characteristics

Student veterans are defined as "any student who is a current or former member of the active duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use" (Vacchi, 2012, p. 17). Supporting this definition, Cole (2013) describes student veterans as those transitioning from military to campus culture, which is the definition we use given its emphasis on the transition between two cultures.

Approximately 85 percent of student veterans, including active duty military individuals, are 24 years old and older (NCSL, 2014). This age difference from traditional college students may contribute to possible adjustments issues when viewed through the lens of typical college environments. For example, student veterans are more likely to have families, attend multiple institutions in their pathway in attaining a degree, and enroll on a part-time basis (NCSL, 2014). Accustomed to a military lifestyle, active duty and recently deployed student veterans may have difficulty adjusting to higher education's norms and practices. Burnett and Segoria (2009) explained that student veterans feel most comfortable with peer support from one another compared to support from faculty, staff, and non-veteran students. This is in part due to their military training and culture of relying on one another.¹ Moreover, colleges and universities have focused on the traditional college student population, often overlooking the needs of student veterans as a specific population (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Despite student veterans' successful academic performance, higher retention, and higher transfer rates from community colleges to four-year institutions (Vacchi, 2012), studies have also noted that the culture of higher education presents student veterans with changes and challenges (Cole, 2013; Mulhere, 2014; Vacchi, 2012). Some of these challenges includes balancing the demands of family and work, in addition to academic and social integration (Osborne, 2013). Ongoing obstacles exist such as GI Bill processing, health care insurance requirements, bursar practices, and academic and faculty practices (Vacchi, 2012). The extant literature on student veterans primarily focuses on entrance obstacles and the needs of veterans transitioning from military service to academic life, particularly in regard to academic advising (Cole, 2013, Cook & Kim, 2009; Coll, Oh, Joyce, & Coll, 2009; Ely, 2008; Lipka, 2011). Multiple levels of collaboration are often needed among college support services, academic affairs, as well as between academia and outside organizations (Burnett & Segoria, 2009; Vacchi, 2012), which, in turn, can often create additional bureaucratic hoops for student veterans.

Conversely, educationally affiliated and focused organizations such as the Lumina Foundation (Cook & Kim, 2009) and the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) (Finley & McNair, 2013) have focused efforts to increase positive academic outcomes of underserved, non-traditional students. Student veterans are often included in these underrepresented populations (O'Herrin 2011). For its part, the AAC&U in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation creates a campus guide for institutions to conduct self-studies for those institutions planning to address the rapidly changing postsecondary student demographics (AAC&U, 2015). Ironically, in the case of student veterans, higher education's unpreparedness in "investing in culturally competent practices that lead to the success of underserved students—and of all students" (AAC&U, 2015, p. 6) means that higher education is failing both to meet the needs of those who have served and the "country's needs for citizens and workers with postsecondary learning and sought-after skills" (AAC&U, 2015, p. 3).

High-Impact Practices

The AAC&U identifies "techniques and designs for teaching and learning that have proven to be beneficial for student engagement and successful learning among students from many backgrounds" (Association of American Colleges & Universities, n.d.). These High Impact Practices, referenced as HIPs, include opportunities such as (a) First Year Seminars, (b) Writing-Intensive Courses, (c) Collaborative Assignments, (d) Diversity/Global Learning Experiences, (e) Internships, and (f) Capstone Courses. As examples, First Year Seminars are designed to develop critical inquiry skills, assisting students in developing their cognitive abilities, while Collaborative Assignments intend to help students work in teams while learning more from and about the insights of others (AAC&U, 2015). The AAC&U advocates assessing underserved student engagement in High Impact Practices in order to increase access, student learning outcomes and success (Finley, & McNair, 2013) of all students, including veterans.

Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, and Pascarella (2015) found that participation in HIPs such as active participation in collaborative learning resulted in positive demonstrations of growth in areas such as critical thinking and intercultural effectiveness. Overall, their study affirmed the AAC&U's assertion that participation in HIPs aids student learning, growth, and persistence to graduation. In another study, McMahan (2015) review HIPs at a regional, comprehensive university whose goal it was to engage at least 75% of their students to participate in HIPs.

The case study found that nearly 90% of students who engaged in undergraduate research graduated with two years of participation. Additionally, those involved with first-year programs, where students were paired with faculty/staff mentors, had higher six-year graduation rates. This study again reinforces the validity of students' active participation in HIPs. Another study on HIPs pertaining to internships and study abroad programs found that students experiencing these opportunities were better positioned to succeed in the workforce (Brooks & Simpson, 2014). This study suggested transferrable skills enhanced by these experiences are sought by employers in recruitment processes, and echoes trends captured in employer surveys. One particular example is Hart Research Associates' (2015) findings that "employers generally value graduates' completion of various applied and project-based learning experiences, indicating that their company would be more likely to consider hiring a recent college graduate if the individual had engaged in these types of experiences" (p. 7).

Student Veteran Programs

A variety of existing programs assist student veterans with transitioning to and through college. For instance, Veterans Upward Bound is designed to encourage and aid student veterans in their academic skill development to better equip them to succeed in college (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). This program must include a curriculum encompassing foreign language development, mathematics, and laboratory science, as well as provide remedial courses (Steele, 2015). In comparison, the Warrior-Scholar Project helps student veterans before attending college. The goal of the program is to develop student veterans' "social and emotional mindsets appropriate for higher education that might be different from those instilled in the military" (Sutton, 2016, p. 5). To actualize this goal, there are intensive one to two weeklong boot camps hosted at colleges and universities across the United States (Warrior-Scholar Project, n.d.). Using a familiar framework, the boot camp engages veterans in workshops, for 14-16 hours a day, with the aim of helping them learn critical skills needed for college success (Sutton, 2016). The ultimate goal is to increase the retention rates of student veterans in college (Sutton, 2016). The boot camp model is used to resonate with the experiences of student veterans, providing them a familiar framework in which to learn critical skills needed for college success (Sutton, 2016).

Boots to Books is another program included in the extant literature. Programs categorized in this manner acclimate student veterans to college campuses through a variety of means. Some programs provide courses where student veterans enroll and learn about how to adapt to the new college environment. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) recommended courses be provided to assist veterans in making meaning of their wartime experiences and to continue their progression from military to civilian life. One such course is taught by David Chrisinger at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (David Chrisinger, n.d.). Another can be found at the University of Northern Iowa. At this institution, a Boots to Books scholarship fund assists student veterans with affording the various costs of attending college, specifically aiding veterans ineligible for federal benefits, paying for non-eligible items such as student fees, or those supporting their families while in school (University of Northern Iowa, n.d.). An exemplary Boots to Books program occurs at Citrus College campus in Glendora, California (California Teachers Association, March 2009). Citrus has a multi-prong approach in addressing student veterans' needs. It provides courses helping student veterans transition to college, financial assistance, a textbook fund, and a resource center where these students can study and socialize (California Teachers Association, March 2009). Yet, given the focus of

these student veteran programs the degree to which HIPS are encouraged or discussed with veterans is unknown.

Student Veteran and Faculty Connections

A frequent challenge is lack of understanding by faculty about military training, experience, and culture (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014; Osborne, 2013). This lack of understanding can create tension between the student veteran and students and faculty members. Further, politically-charged comments made in class by some faculty members, not relevant to course topics, such as labeling military members as war criminals or terrorists further exacerbate feelings of disconnect by student veterans (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2014; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Lack of understanding of military students' experiences coupled with statements of aggression can create barriers for student veterans. Conversely, tapping into the experiences and maturity of student veterans can aid classroom discussions and topics since "veterans can bring with them a wealth of knowledge about living abroad, as well as deep personal experience with innovation, accountability, and responsibility" (O'Herrin, 2011, p. 1). When faculty members understand the benefits students with military experience possess, they can bring those experiences into the classroom to help student veterans to feel a sense of belonging. Further, faculty can use their relationships with student veterans to encourage them to participate in HIPS, increasing chances of persistence.

Persistence

Persistence is the action whereby students continue their undergraduate education to the point of graduation whether from the institution where they started or from another (Renn & Reason, 2012; St. John et al., 2013). An outcome of students attending college is attaining a degree leading to either gainful employment or access to further education. On the one hand, student veterans do not fully utilize their GI Bill benefits with less than 10% using their entire financial subsidy (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). This is one factor potentially linking student veterans' lack of persistence in completing college degrees. Student veterans may have more affordable access to college through the GI Bill and the Post-9/11 GI Bill than other nontraditional or underserved communities, but access does not necessarily equate to persistence to graduation. On the other hand, student veterans' more advanced years and experiences (compared to traditional students) before arriving at college suggest they are better able to manage goals and intentions leading to degree completion (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Goals and intentions, as well as strong connections to their educational institution impact student veterans' motivation based on how connected their "resolve is to persist at the institution" (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011, p. 41). Persisting through enhanced academic and social connections aids students, particularly student veterans, in accomplishing their objective of graduation. Student veterans completing college can then gain access to further educational opportunities and higher paying jobs as a result of completing their college degree.

Role of Administration

As student veterans transitioned from military life to civilian life, post-secondary institutions have addressed academic and institutional support opportunities assisting student veterans' challenges, retention, persistence, and completion rates. Many student veterans are anxious and lack confidence when starting a new chapter in their life involving a new mission outside a military structure so familiar to them (Osborne, 2013; Steele, 2015). Higher

education administrators can lessen levels of anxiety by reinforcing a military-friendly institutional culture that regards student veterans with integrity, dignity, and honor (Wilson, 2014). Academic and student support services exemplars that are used include: veteran-specific courses; faculty and staff assigned to assist student veterans with admission, financial, and registration paperwork; student veterans' organizations; faculty, counselor, and staff professional development; and veterans resource centers as resources requiring minimal additional human resources and modest funding but possessing potential significant outcomes (Evans, Pellegrino, & Hoggan, 2015). Institutionalizing a supportive, military-friendly campus culture fosters potential for student veterans to feel more accepted and connected with faculty, staff, and students, thereby influencing self-identification (Osborne, 2013).

In order to address the unique educational needs of student veterans, postsecondary institutions have implemented multifaceted approaches. For example, Cook and Kim's (2009) national survey results indicate the percentage of institutions who have a veteran's center (14.4%) or committees (38.2%) charged with creating a campus climate conducive to the success of student veterans. Burnett and Segoria (2009) highlight that institution-wide committees have opportunities to take unified approaches through dismantling silos between institutional areas including Academic, Business, and Student Affairs areas bringing campus units together to optimize the success of student veterans. These aforementioned methods better serve as institutional services versus practices meant to impact student learning itself. Once the educational environment is conducive to supporting student veterans, then recommended HIPs practices can be effectively implemented. As such, the AAC&U advocates assessing underserved students' engagement in HIPs, including through student feedback, in order to increase access and enhance student learning outcomes (Finley, & McNair, 2013) of all students, including veterans.

Methods

The current project was drawn from a collaborative case study (Yin, 2012) that focused on understanding the experiences of today's college students. A collaborative case study provides an opportunity for multiple researchers to collect data from various sites and sources that all contribute to understanding a common phenomenon (Yin, 2012). The larger case study from which the current sample was drawn focused on the experiences (e.g., challenges, successes, engagement) of current undergraduate populations in higher education. The total data set included 45 participant interviews from three sub-populations of college students: (a) student veterans, (b) Black male undergraduates, and (c) Christian students attending religiously-affiliated institutions. In the current study, we selected all student veteran participants and examined those interviews using the following research questions:

1. What learning experiences (HIPs) do student veterans participate in and value in developing the skills and competencies they view as important?
2. What are the perceived barriers to student veteran participation in HIPs and how can the institutions address these barriers?

Data Collection

Data collection occurred primarily through the use of semi-structured interviews that were conducted in Fall 2015. Under the direction of the case study principal investigator (PI; Parker), student research assistants completed interviews with 14 student veterans from three institutions of higher education located throughout the state of North Carolina. The 14 participants provided repetitive patterns of information in their responses that demonstrated

saturation had been achieved (Creswell, 2013; Plano, Clark, & Ivankova, 2016). Author 1 (Kappell) was one of three student research assistants who conducted interviews with student veterans, completing a total of four interviews. Interviews from all student research assistants ranged from approximately 25-75 minutes in length and were audio recorded for accuracy during transcription. In addition to interview transcripts, student research assistants compiled detailed field notes during each interview. The inclusion of multiple sources of data from multiple researchers provided an opportunity to triangulate findings, which is one strength of a case study approach (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

Before the interview, participants completed a form that was used to compile demographic information. The interview protocol included 13 questions that related to various aspects of the participants' experiences in higher education, including the challenges they encountered and factors that have helped them be successful. The protocol also included multiple questions about the participants' perceptions of the ways in which their identity (i.e., veteran status) has affected their experience as a college student (see Appendix A). Additionally, participants completed a checklist that asked them to identify the AAC&U's High-Impact Educational Practices (HIPs) they had participated in or planned to participate in during their undergraduate experience (see Appendix B).

Sites

Data collection occurred across three different sites within the state of North Carolina. The three sites are institutions of higher education that represent varying missions and serve disparate student populations, despite their common location. Two of the three institutions of higher education have resources such as a dedicated military resource center and full-time staff directly serving student veterans to facilitate their success. Participants were recruited from the following sites: (a) Mid-sized Regional University (MRU), a comprehensive regional university; (b) State Community College (SCC), a two-year public institution located within 10 miles of MRU; and (c) Small College, a small, private liberal arts college.

Mid-sized Regional University (MRU) has a population of approximately 14,000 undergraduate and graduate students. This school has nearly 1,500 student veterans, a military resource facility opening in the past year, and two full-time staff dedicated to serving this student population.

State Community College (SCC) has over 28,000 students with an estimated 10 percent of the student population being student veterans. This campus has had a dedicated military resource facility for over five years and a full-time staff member serving this population.

Small College has a student population of over 1,200 students, of which around 40 are student veterans. There is no military resource facility or dedicated full-time staff at Small College.

Participants

Participants were selected using criterion sampling (Creswell, 2014), which provided an appropriate group of participants (cases) through which we could examine the experiences of student veterans (phenomenon) (Yin, 2012, 2014). Participants were required to meet the following criteria for participation: (a) currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at one of the three sites, and (b) veteran status regardless of length of time served in the military; we included veterans, reservists, and active military (Vacchi, 2012). Participants were solicited through an email that was shared with the respective student veterans' organization at each

site. The email indicated that individuals willing to assist in this study could contact the respective student research assistants included in the message. Once a potential participant contacted a student research assistant, the assistant verified their eligibility to participate (i.e., status as currently enrolled and identity as a student veteran), and then scheduled a time to interview the participant.

Student veteran participants included in the current study were predominantly male and Caucasian. Among the 14 student veterans included in this analysis, only two identified as non-white and only one identified as female. Nine students attend MRU, two attend SCC, and three attend Small College. A table is included in Appendix C that provides pseudonyms and demographic information collected during interviews.

Data Analysis

Student research assistants transcribed all interviews in order to prepare them for analysis. Data analysis was conducted in multiple phases that most closely resembles a constant comparative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The initial phase of analysis was completed by the student research assistants who conducted interviews with student veteran participants. Each student research assistant independently reviewed the transcripts and developed general categories of concepts and information through an “open coding” process (Creswell, 2014, p. 196). Next, the research team gathered to discuss the codes they developed independently in order to begin sorting and organizing those codes under common themes, which were used to develop detailed descriptions of student veterans’ experiences and compare those themes to what was discussed in the literature as “broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (Creswell, 2013, p. 186).

During this initial phase, several concepts and codes were identified including, but not limited to: (a) academic focus, (b) peer connections, (c) institutional support, and (d) family support. This then led to the second stage of the data analysis process, reviewing fellow researchers’ transcriptions for additional or complementary codes. At this stage of the data analysis process, student researchers reviewed codes and aligned them thematically into fewer, more encompassing areas, grouping similar codes into categories for subsequent discussion and implications. In the final stage of analysis, codes were refined to three themes related to HIPs. We resisted theorizing based on a case study of 14 because the data corpus does not support such claims.

Data Trustworthiness and Quality

Trustworthiness and the rigor are paramount in ensuring quality of a qualitative research project. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to trustworthiness as necessary to establish that the findings are determined through the data itself versus the bias of researchers. Similarly, credibility, or “the extent to which the qualitative findings are perceived as accurately conveying the student participants’ experiences” (Plano, Clark, & Ivankova, 2016, p. 167), is an important consideration in qualitative research. We maintained trustworthiness and credibility through triangulation and peer and expert review. Peer review was completed through discussion and data analysis with other student research assistants assigned to this project. As a supplementary step in ensuring trustworthiness, researchers reviewed field notes incorporating them into the data analysis process. Expert review was used through sharing findings with university professionals from the veteran student commission.

Results

Given the data collected, student veterans engaged more actively in four HIPs compared to the six remaining HIPs. The HIPs most frequently experienced included: Common Intellectual Experiences (10 participants); Writing Intensive Courses (10 participants); Collaborative Assignments (11 participants); and Diversity/Global Learning (10 participants). Conversely, two HIPs had the least participation. These were Capstone Courses and Projects (2 participants) and First Year Seminars (3 participants). See Appendix D, which depicts HIPs participation by student and site.

The total number of HIPs participated in changed as institution type changed (see Appendix E). In examining HIPs participation across institutions, on the surface, student veterans at MRU (largely represented in the sample) participated in more HIPs than those at Small College or SCC. Yet, when taking into account the sample at each institution, student veterans participated in more HIPs at SCC than at MRU or SC. When analyzing specific HIPs, the student veterans sampled did not participate in capstone courses or projects nor undergraduate research at SC or SCC. In contrast, two of nine student veterans at MRU participated in capstone courses or projects and four of nine participated in undergraduate research.

After considering the participation in HIPs by the student veterans in this study, three main themes were identified from the interviews: (a) mission-orientation; (b) competing priorities; and (c) marketing to student veterans.

Mission-Orientation

Mission-orientation pertained to their participation in HIPs through minimizing obstacles, being efficient with their coursework, and thereby completing college within the confines of their GI Bill coverage. The mission-like focus of student veterans entails their goal to graduate. This area includes subthemes of *minimizing obstacles*, *efficiency of coursework*, and *completing college within the confines of GI Bill coverage*. This was a recurring theme across multiple participants and sites as they expressed a focus on completing their college degrees. The words and attitudes participants expressed offered a mindset often affiliated with military structure and accomplishment. Their words conveyed heavy focus on successful mission accomplishment by overcoming or minimizing obstacles. One student veteran stated, “my goal is to graduate” following up with his personal view of “figur[ing] out what classes I need to the very minimum and the classes I need to succeed” (Ace). Attaining a college degree was seen as the *next step* requiring completion to move on with their lives.

Another student veteran articulated his viewpoint regarding general college participation saying, “school is my check-in, check-out, do what I have to do” (Edward). Sentiments such as these portray student veterans’ lack of desire to deviate from the core requirements they need in order to graduate. The message of efficiency of college was shared by a participant offering, “basically the biggest thing is I want to finish my school within the confines of the GI Bill” (Tim). This emphasizes the point of completing college under the umbrella of limited funding and the need for increased efficiency and minimized distractions.

Competing Priorities

Competing priorities related to HIPs participation in the eyes of student veterans, as they were concerned with balancing school and personal life. The theme competing priorities encompasses subthemes of *family obligations* and *barriers to participate in HIPs*. Several student veterans expressed a heightened priority on experiences and obligations outside the college

realm. The primary concerns for student veterans pertained to family obligations and balancing school and personal life. One student veteran articulated his viewpoint saying, “my main life is outside of school” (Edward). Another shared his perspective that fully participating in traditional academic experiences such as study abroad was not feasible for him due to his responsibilities to his daughter. Relating to the difference between traditional versus non-traditional college students, some student veterans expressed what they felt to be barriers in engaging with HIPs. Staci shared her sentiments that college experiences are challenging in that “it’s very based on traditional students,” conveying that as a non-traditional student, she felt many of these opportunities were not meant for her. This sentiment of opportunities being targeted more towards traditional college students, commonly referred to as “kids” by veterans, was present through six of the 14 interviews conducted.

Marketing to Student Veteran Populations

Marketing to student veterans addressed the concepts of knowing how their participation in HIPs would directly impact their future career opportunities. This involves subthemes of *conveying importance and relevance to future career, incentives, and involving peer student veterans*. This area provided rich information with student veterans offering suggestions to attract their peers’ participation in HIPs. Several participants expressed they would be more likely to participate if what was being offered directly related to their future career, having a tangible impact on their career success. One student stated, “I think they should develop clear examples of how what they do in one exercise, or what they learned in one seminar relates to a real job” (David). Another used a term he called “WIFM: What’s In it For Me” (Tim) articulating his desire to know the benefits of participating in HIPs for himself and other veterans. His primary concern, voiced similarly by others, was *why* they should engage in these practices.

Four of the student veterans interviewed were unsure of the benefits of participation and two said they were completely unaware of HIPs, and were therefore seeking additional information prior to committing to something they did not see as a priority directly related to their goal of graduation. If after knowing how HIPs experiences would positively impact them, three student veteran participants said they were more likely to get involved if other peer student veterans were present. Having come from the military and being acclimated to being a member of a unit, these specific students expressed an openness to participate alongside peers. They heard about opportunities through word of mouth, personal connections with faculty and staff, and through departmental emails.

Discussion

Interestingly, the HIPs most utilized are ones that are typically built into academic coursework (e.g., Writing Intensive Courses). While participants were interviewed from three separate institutions, it was difficult to ascertain if a specific campus had more appeal than another in attracting student veterans’ participation in specific HIPs. Nonetheless, with the recent and impending growth of student veteran populations on college campuses (Osborne, 2013; Steele, 2015), these findings are timely and important to understand and further use as a source for guidance.

One of the three themes aligned strongly with existing literature: mission-orientation. Mission-orientation speaks to the focus seen by study participants in their persistence to graduation. Vacchi (2012) spoke of student veterans being a product of military training and, as a result, focused on achieving their mission. Some of their focus on completing missions

centers on previous military training instilling in them a strong purpose and teamwork (Osborne, 2013). Working together as units while in the military as a result of their training and focus on goal accomplishment resonates with the results of this study. Student veterans viewed graduation as the completion of their college mission. To deviate or be distracted through what they believed to be unnecessary activities were not of interest to them. Student veterans can adapt and overcome many obstacles in completing their mission (Vacchi, 2012), but in this case, they may view participation in HIPs as avoidable distractions.

The concept of competing priorities was discussed by student veterans as having duties and obligations outside their academic commitments. In this study, student veterans saw college as the means to an end to better provide for their families. This theme was echoed in the literature in that Osborne (2013) and Griffin and Gilbert (2015) found family obligations kept student veterans from their civilian peers in college. Student veterans placed a priority in being home with their families as opposed to fully engaging in traditional college life. While this was the case with the students interviewed during this research, others scholars see family structures through the lens of support afforded to student veterans in aiding them (Barry et al., 2014; Osborne, 2013) to graduation. Balancing these opposing viewpoints, families were both seen as competing priorities and a means for student veteran support. However, much of what we found from the study participants indicated their families were a stronger focus than college engagement.

Yet, engagement in HIPs and family responsibilities need not be mutually exclusive. Given the additional time and resources required by the faculty member and the student, and in some cases a community partner, to properly implement a HIP, all HIPs should be designed to address a particular goal. For example, many student veterans, including Edward, cite the competing priority of child care as a reason they do not participate in study abroad. If, however, the goal is enhancing a students' intercultural competency, then alternative HIPs exist. One of the authors of this article addressed this same obstacle for a student veteran by facilitating internships in which the student veteran built language and cultural competencies working with diverse populations in North Carolina. Moreover, the student then has more flexibility in terms of scheduling, as the applied learning experience need not (and often cannot) take place within a rigid, traditional class structure. Whereas the "kids," referenced by Staci, might need the structure provided by a closely monitored HIP, such as a First Year Seminar, a student veteran might possess the maturity and discipline required to carry out a supervised, but highly independent internship or research project in which she is also being entrusted with representing the university or college. Within the parlance of strategy, there can be multiple means to achieve the same end, and the end is not the specific type of HIP, but the learning and competencies to be gained.

Regarding marketing, four of the student veterans were unaware of the existence of HIPs as a factor for their lack of engagement in them. Student veterans are generally used to receiving orders and expected to complete missions, since they are a product of a "professional all-volunteer standing military, seasoned by the highest-quality training" (Vacchi, 2012, p. 17). In this aspect, they are following orders and competing military-related missions by way of their training and compliance. Student veterans may feel participation in HIPs are optional and not needed to graduate. Part of this may be due to student veterans' lack of awareness of how HIPs can benefit them academically and professionally. By marketing to student veteran populations, they can become aware of HIPs and advantages to participating in them. As a result, student veterans may be more likely to participate as it would pertain to aiding them achieve their mission of graduation and future employment possibilities.

The themes listed may have a compounding effect. For example, inadequate marketing that fails to segment and target the right population with the most effective message may facilitate the further skewing of mission-orientation toward a definition in which degree completion is the ultimate goal, independent of mastery and long-term adaptability. As one veteran and author of the present study can attest, “just getting it done” is not the appropriate focus when the orientation is that of military training. An oft-repeated military mantra one “trains to standard, not to time.” Insofar as HIPs are designed to improve student outcomes and competencies, then higher education professionals have the responsibility of communicating effectively the benefits of HIPs to student veterans beyond the purely extrinsic motivator of possessing a credential.

Limitations

The student veterans may have been positively or negatively biased, prompting their participation in the study. Student veterans were not extensively asked about their participation in the four highly utilized HIPs versus the others. As such, the researchers did not draw conclusions about why some HIPs were selected more than others. Notably, students in this study were predominantly white males. This resulted in a dominant culture perspective, whereas more female and/or non-white participants may have yielded different data. The veterans were enrolled at three institutions located in Southeastern North Carolina, which may have unique characteristics compared to other places in North Carolina or other states. For example, the region includes multiple military bases that provide a critical mass of personnel and family members that require specialized support services; similar opportunities may not exist in areas with a smaller military-affiliated population.

Future Research

Researchers can continue to explore student veterans’ participation in HIPs as well as student veterans’ issues relating to faculty connections, persistence, and the specific role of administration in addressing the concerns of student veterans documented by empirical research. In this study, one female student veteran articulated strong desires to blend in with her fellow non-veteran students. Hence, future studies can focus on exploring the female veteran experience as well as compare female and male veterans involvement in HIPs. Future research can and should investigate levels of participation in HIPs and how best to minimize barriers inhibiting HIPs participation.

Conclusion

This study is based on student veterans who met the criteria that volunteered to participate through a purposeful focus on three institutions in North Carolina. We provided descriptions of the sites and the participants in order to clearly depict the sample and setting in order to facilitate transferability of the findings. Given the findings, it is imperative to consider the needs of student veterans and opportunities that will facilitate their success once enrolled in college. Faculty, staff, and students can advocate for the more utilized HIPs such as Common Intellectual Experiences, Writing Intensive Courses, Collaborative Assignments, and Diversity/Global Learning than those not as highly employed. Meanwhile, the HIPs that are not utilized as frequently can be advertised and discussed to facilitate greater engagement of veteran students.

References

- Association of American Colleges & Universities. (2015). *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence. A Campus Guide for Self-Study and Planning*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities.
- Association of American Colleges & Universities. (n.d.). Leap Campus Toolkit. Retrieved from <http://leap.AACU.org/toolkit/high-impact-practices>.
- Barry, A. E., Whiteman, S. D., & MacDermid Wadsworth, S. (2014). Student service members/veterans in higher education: A systematic review. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 51*(1), 30–42. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/jsarp-2014-0003>
- Brooks, L. & Simpson, L. (2014). Experiential learning in higher education: Implications for improving employability of FCS graduates. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences, 106*(2), 16–21.
- Burnette, S., & Segoria, J. (2009). Collaboration for military transition students from combat to college: It takes a community. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 22*(1), 53–58.
- California Teachers Association. (March 2009). 'Boots to books' at Citrus College eases transition for returning war veterans. *44*(3). Retrieved from <http://www.cta.org/en/Professional-Development/Publications/2009/03/Advocate-March-April-09/Boots-to-Books.aspx>
- Callahan, R., & Jarrat, D. (2014, Mar-Apr 2014). Helping student service members and veterans succeed. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 46*(2), 36–41.
- Cole, J. (2013). Best practices for advising veteran students. *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal*, ISSN: 1521–2211.
- Coll, J. E., Oh, H., Joyce, C., & Coll, L. C. (2009, April 29). Veterans in higher education: What every adviser may want to know. *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.psu.edu/dus/mentor>.
- Cook, B., & Kim, Y. (2009). *From soldier to student: Easing the transition of service members on campus*. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/From-Soldier-to-Student-Easing-the-Transition-of-Service-Members-on-Campus.pdf>.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- David Chrisinger (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://davidchrisinger.com/>.
- DiRamio, D., & Jarvis, K. (2011). Special issue: Veterans in higher education — when Johnny and Jane come marching to campus. *ASHE higher education report, 37*(3), 1.

- Ely, M. (2008). Veterans in College: What advisers should expect. *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal*, 10(3), 1–2.
- Evans, J. J., Pellegrino, L., & Hoggan, C. (2015). Supporting veterans at the community college: A review of the literature. *The Community College Enterprise*, 21(1), 47–65.
- Finley, A. & McNair, T. (2013). Assessing underserved students' engagement in High-Impact Practices. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Griffin, K. A., & Gilbert, C. K. (2015). Better transitions for troops: An application of Schlossberg's transition framework to analyses of barriers and institutional support structures for student veterans. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 86(1), 71.
- Hart Research Associates. (2015). *Falling short? College learning and career success*. Washington DC: Hart Research Associates.
- Kilgo, C. A., Ezell Sheets, J., K., & Pascarella, E. T. (2015). The link between high-impact practices and student learning: Some longitudinal evidence. *Higher Education*, 69(4), 509–525.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Lipka, S. (2011). Half of student veterans have contemplated suicide, study shows. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Half-of-Student-Veterans-Have/128524/>.
- McMahan, S. (2015). Creating a model for high impact practices at a large, regional, comprehensive university: A case study. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER)*, 8(2), 111–116. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.19030/cier.v8i2.9144>.
- Mulhere, K. (2014). Complexity of student vets. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/11/24/more-research-needed-student-veterans>.
- National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). (2014). Veterans and college. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/veterans-and-college.aspx>.
- North Carolina support networks for student veterans. (2014). Retrieved from <http://ncveteransworkinggroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/North-Carolina-Student-Veteran-infographic.pdf>.
- O'Herrin, E. (2011). Enhancing veteran success in higher education. *Peer Review*, 15(1), 15–18.
- Osborne, N. J. (2013). Veteran ally: Practical strategies for closing the military-civilian gap on campus. *Innovative Higher Education*, 39(3), 247–260.
- Renn, K. A., & Reason, R. D. (2012). *College students in the United States: Characteristics, experiences, and outcomes*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- St. John, E. P., Daun-Barnett, N., Moronski-Chapman, K. M., & Routledge. (2013). *Public policy and higher education: Reframing strategies for preparation, access and college success*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Steele, B. (2015). Postsecondary preparatory programs for veterans: A federal reporting chasm. *Planning for Higher Education*, 43(2), 63–70.
- Sutton, H. (2016). Ensure veterans' success on campus by starting before enrollment. *Enrollment Management Report*, 19(11), 1–5.

- University of Northern Iowa (n.d.). Military and Veteran Student Services. Retrieved from <https://www.uni.edu/military/boots-books>.
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.) Veterans Upwards Bound Program. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triovub/index.html>.
- Vacchi, D. (2012). Considering student veterans on the twenty-first-century college campus. *Wiley Online Library*, May–June, 15–21. doi:10.1002/abc.21075.
- Warrior-Scholar Project. (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://warrior-scholar.org/index.html>.
- Wilson, K. B. (2014). Perspectives in HRD. Thank you for your service: Military initiatives on college campuses. *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development*, 26(3), 54–60.
-

Jon Kapell, MA, Director for Campus Activities & Involvement, University of North Carolina Wilmington // kapellj@uncw.edu

Jess Boersma, PhD, Associate Professor of Spanish, University of North Carolina Wilmington // boersmaj@uncw.edu

James DeVita, PhD, Assistant Professor of Higher Education, University of North Carolina Wilmington // devitaj@uncw.edu

Michele Parker, PhD, Associate Profess of Higher Education, University of North Carolina Wilmington // parkerma@uncw.edu

Appendix A: Today's College Student Case Study Interview and Focus Group Protocol

Instructions and Summary of Research

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. We are researching the experiences of today's college students to understand how college affects your personal and intellectual development. We are especially interested in learning how your experiences prior to college, personal identities, and engagement on campus affect your overall experience. We are asking you to participate in at least one interview as part of your participation in the study. Additionally, we would like to collect artifacts (images, portraits, etc.) that are significant to you and your role as a college student. All aspects of the study are voluntary, which is detailed in the informed consent form that we will review. You must sign this form in order to participate. I will provide you with a copy for your records so that you have information about the study as well as contact information should you need to reach me or the Principal Investigator.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences as a college student. What stands out to you when you think about your time as a college student?
2. What are some successes you've had as a college student? Provide examples or anecdotes.
3. What factors contributed to those successes? How did they help you succeed?
4. What are some challenges you've encountered as a college student? Provide examples or anecdotes.
5. What factors contributed to those challenges? How did they help you to overcome them?
6. What identities do you consider most important to you? Why are those most important?
7. Are there any expectations or pressures that you feel because of those identities? Why do you think those exist?
8. Have you participated in or are you planning to participate in any of the following?:
 - i. First-Year Seminar and/or Experiences
 - ii. Common Intellectual Experiences (e.g., Transdisciplinary Clusters, General Education)
 - iii. Learning Community
 - iv. Writing-Intensive Courses
 - v. Collaborative Assignments and Projects
 - vi. Undergraduate Research
 - vii. Diversity/Global Learning
 - viii. Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
 - ix. Internships
 - x. Capstone Courses and Projects
9. If you did, what do you feel you gained from each specific experience in terms of educational growth and/or job preparation?
10. If you didn't or don't plan to, are there any specific reasons why you didn't?
11. Do you feel there are any barriers specific to Vets participation in these activities?
12. How should faculty and staff advertise the importance of these activities to veterans?
13. How do you pursue these opportunities?

Appendix B: High-Impact Practices Questions

1. Have you participated in or are you planning to participate in any of the following?
 - First-Year Seminar and/or Experiences
 - Common Intellectual Experiences (e.g., Transdisciplinary Clusters, General Education)
 - Learning Community
 - Writing-Intensive Courses
 - Collaborative Assignments and Projects
 - Undergraduate Research
 - Diversity/Global Learning
 - Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
 - Internships
 - Capstone Courses and Projects
2. If you did, what do you feel you gained from the specific experience in terms of educational growth and/or job preparation?
3. If you didn't or don't plan to, are there any specific reasons why you didn't?
4. Do you feel there are any barriers specific to Vets participation in these activities?
5. How should faculty and staff advertise the importance of these activities to veterans?
6. How do you pursue these opportunities?

Definitions for the above listed high-impact educational practices are defined by the AAC&U on their website: https://www.AACU.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/HIP_tables.pdf

Appendix C: Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Military Affiliation	Socioeconomic Status	Race	Gender
Ace	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Bob	Army	Middle	Caucasian	Male
Bruce	Army	Middle	Caucasian	Male
Calvin	Marines	Low	Pacific Islander	Male
Charles	Army	Lower/Middle	Bi-racial	Male
David	Army	N/A	Caucasian	Male
Edward	Marine	N/A	Caucasian	Male
Famer	Army	Middle	Caucasian	Male
Felix	Coast Guard	Middle	Caucasian	Male
Fred	Marines	Lower/Middle	Caucasian	Male
Floyd	Army	N/A	Caucasian	Male
JC	Coast Guard	N/A	Caucasian	Male
Staci	Army	N/A	Caucasian	Female
Tim	Marines	Middle	Caucasian	Male

Note: N/A indicates that the information is not available.

* Participant Ace chose not to provide demographic details indicated as N/As in the first

Appendix D: HIP Participation by Participant & Site

	Ace	Bob	Bruce	Charles	David	Felix	JC	Staci	Tim	Calvin	Edward	Famer	Fred	Floyd
First Year Seminars		X	X										X	
Common Intellectual Experiences	X	X	X	X				X		X	X	X	X	X
Learning Communities				X						X		X	X	
Writing-Intensive Courses	X	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X		X
Collaborative Assignments and Projects	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Undergraduate Research		X	X	X					X					
Diversity/Global Learning	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	
Service Leader, Community-Based Learning		X	X	X				X				X	X	
Internships	X	X	X	X					X				X	

Capstone Courses and Projects		X		X										
Total HIPs Participated	5	9	7	9	2	3	1	5	4	5	5	6	6	3

- * Students without shading attend Mid-sized Regional University (MRU).
- * Students with dark grey shading attend Small College.
- * Students with light grey shading attend State Community College (SCC).

Appendix E: Total Number of HIPs Student Veterans Participated in According to Site

	MRU	SC	SCC	Total
High Impact Practice	n=9	n=3	n=2	N=14
First Year Seminars	2	0	1	3
Common Intellectual Experiences	5	3	2	10
Learning Communities	1	2	1	4
Writing-Intensive Courses	6	3	1	10
Collaborative Assignments and Projects	8	3	0	11
Undergraduate Research	4	0	0	4
Diversity/Global Learning	6	3	1	10
Service Leader, Community-Based Learning	4	1	1	6
Internships	5	0	1	6
Capstone Courses and Projects	2	0	0	2
Total HIPs Participated	43 (21%)	15 (20%)	8 (25%)	

* Students without shading attend Mid-sized Regional University (MRU).

* Students with dark grey shading attend Small College.

* Students with light grey shading attend State Community College (SCC).