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Military Connected Student Perspectives of a Large Public University's Veteran Career Development Program

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Abstract

This empirical study investigated military connected student perspectives at a large public university concerning any benefits gained by their involvement with the university's career center's inceptive veteran specific career development program referred to by the pseudonym, Student Veteran Career Development Transitional Program (SVCDDTP). Participants program were all former or current military service members enrolled as college students. Program enrollment ranged from five to twenty student veterans. The central research question was, "What are the participating military connected student perspectives as to if and how the program sessions and material may help them find civilian employment in their future career goals?" Methods such as participant observation, direct observation, program participant questionnaires, and a reflective report from the program coordinator were used to gather data, which was inductively analyzed. Resultant findings looked at perspectives of participating stakeholders, which supported this study's assertion that the SVCDDTP was positive in enhancing university military connected students' future employability.

Keywords: Student Veteran, Military Connected Student, Employability, Career Development University Career Center, Veteran Program

Introduction

The focus of this study was to examine U.S. military connected student perspectives of the Student Veteran Career Development Transitional Program (SVCDDTP) at a large (40,000 plus students) public university, in terms of how this program may enhance or improve students' future employability. Much has been written about how post-secondary institutions play an important role in student veterans' career development and preparedness (Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Heineman, 2016; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010), with this in mind, this study's general research purpose was to examine how a specific large university veterans' specific career services program is either beneficial or not toward military connected students' career success according to their perspectives.

This study's research question was, "What are the participating military connected student perspectives as to if and how the program sessions and material may help them find civilian employment in their future career goals?" This topic is worth exploring because our nation's recent military veterans have a higher rate of civilian unemployment than that of their non-veteran civilian counterparts when comparing age demographics. To improve this discrepancy, our nation's higher education institutional veteran specific career services can assist transitioning military veterans by providing necessary career development and employability skills, as these students will eventually graduate and enter the civilian workplace.

Background and Significance of the Problem

According to a recent U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics Economic News Release (2016), the unemployment rate of 18-24 year old Gulf War Era II veterans for 2016 was 9.2 percent, compared to an unemployment rate of 9.6 percent for 18-24 year old civilians. However, the historical trend is much higher with this same category of unemployment rate of 18-24 year old Gulf

War Era II veterans, for 2013 being 21.4 percent compared to a 14.3 percent unemployment rate of 18-24 year old non-military civilians (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013; Kleykamp, 2009). Additionally, this historically high unemployment rate for 2011 was 30.2 percent, compared to an unemployment rate of 16.1 percent for 18-24 year old non-military civilians (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The 2011 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau indicated that as of September 2001, the number of wartime veterans, having served in Afghanistan and Iraq, is 2.5 million people out of a 2010 census population of 306 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Furthermore, as a result of military service related disability or injury, 26.7 percent of the 2.5 million veterans qualify for a service-connected disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), which further emphasizes the need to meet a diverse and complex set of challenges for these veterans in their employment endeavors than that of their “able-bodied” counterparts. Finally, aside from the high unemployment of wartime veterans and their potential for combat related disorders, there is a high economic cost to our nation, as mentioned in a *USA Today* report, which states, “the military paid \$882 million in unemployment benefits last year, up from \$450 million in fiscal 2008. The 2011 figures are trending even higher” (Zoroya, 2011).

These numbers suggest a call for action to consider the employability of veterans in terms of a substantial public policy perspective, to create, implement, sustain, and evaluate a comprehensive and connected transitional employment program designed for the veteran to be as optimally functional and as independent as possible (Humensky, Jordan, Stroupe, & Hynes, 2012). This employment program should be one that is highly correlated to meeting the recruitment and hiring goals of U.S. companies that align profitability and productivity with sought after workforce traits such as talent, competitiveness, and capacity (Booe, 2005; King, 2011).

U.S. companies and firms, such as those involved in mining, manufacturing, and producing non-durable goods, have in the past several decades substantially changed in terms of moving from a manufacturing base of business to a market of service and industry of a highly technological nature (Hatch & Clinton, 2000; Holtzer, 1996). This transition has seen U.S. manufacturing and production become globalized with production outsourced to cheaper labor markets in different countries, combined with lower paying and skilled jobs going to an increasing immigrant labor population in the U.S., requiring the remaining U.S. workforce to become skilled in technology and specialized and sophisticated within the current workforce (Marshall & Kumar, 2012; Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch, 2014; Weinert, Baukens, Bollerot, Pineschi-Gapenne, & Walwei, 2001). Of significance is that employers (e.g., software design firms), who are looking for highly-skilled and educated workers to hire and promote in today’s labor force, are willing to pay competitive wages instead of recruiting for lower paying, less skilled positions often found in manufacturing and factory work (Gordon, 2013; Marshall & Kumar, 2012).

Since mid-2008, six million jobs have permanently disappeared from the U.S. economy; however, the U.S.’ gross domestic product has doubled to over \$15 trillion due to increased productivity, mostly due to advanced machinery requiring fewer, highly-skilled workers in advanced technology, and higher exports of goods and services (Gordon, 2013). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts that 54.7 million jobs need to be filled by 2020 with the growth in almost every U.S. industry, primarily in research and development, information technology, operations, management, and sales, with strong occupational emphasis in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Furthermore, most of these STEM employment positions will require post-secondary education of at least a bachelor’s degree (Gordon, 2013). Current literature suggests a number of policy recommendations designed to enhance the career readiness via programming and services for those veterans transitioning through higher education toward the world-of-work

(Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), 2013; Hayden, Ledwith, Dong, & Buzzetta, 2014).

Program Overview

With regard to the problems that exist as a result of a globalized economy and the lack of opportunities that result, veterans are often poorly positioned between the realm of higher education and employment that requires a post-secondary education. To that end, the Student Veteran Career Development Transitional Program (SVCDTP) [a pseudonym] at a large public university seeks to attend to this situation. Founded at the beginning of the spring academic semester of 2015, this program is the first of its kind offered at its institution.

The program's goal was to provide career readiness and professional development to enrolled military connected students seeking civilian employment post-graduation. This inceptive program sought to meet its goals by inviting military connected students along with civilian employers who actively recruit veterans to work in their agencies and businesses, working with university officials to create relevant career development materials intended to promote career awareness and career readiness for its post-secondary military connected students. For example, several program sessions were conceived to provide military connected students with applicable and practical information by incorporating employer recruiters. That along with the program coordinator, presented valuable career awareness and career readiness content materials designed to be well received and appreciated by the participating military connected student audience. The SVCDTP workshop five-session content was as follows:

- Session 1: Résumé Writing: Translating Your Military Experience
- Session 2: Career Fair Prep & Interview Skills
- Session 3: Employer Panel on How to Articulate Your Military Experience to Recruiters
- Session 4: Evaluating Job Offers: How to Negotiate "Orders"
- Session 5: Pre-Campus Career Fair: Networking Event

Methodology

The qualitative approach used for this study is representative of case study, which according to Creswell (2014), involves collecting data concerning an event or activity that involves a person or people within a certain time period. This section includes an account of the study site and the participant selection, the sampling scheme explanation, and the plan for data collection and analysis.

Study Sites and Participants

I conducted participant observations for planning meetings concerning sessions four and five for this program at two different study sites operated by the university's career center. Also, I conducted direct observations of participating military connected student perspectives and the interview at campus facilities.

The study participants were U.S. military veterans recently separated from one of the four branches of armed forces (i.e., Army, Air Force, Navy & Marine Corps) and/or were currently serving in the Armed Forces Reserves or National Guard. By stating, "recently separated from military service," my intention was to focus on those Gulf War Era II veterans who have served during one of the three military campaign time periods (i.e., Operation of Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn) and are currently transitioning to civilian employment via post-secondary education. For the purposes of this study, "military connected student" and "student veteran" are used interchangeably.

Even though this study's research question inquires about the participating military connected student perspectives as to if and how the program sessions and material may help them find civilian employment in their future career goals, I choose to include the program's coordinator's perspective for the following reasons. Since I was introduced mid-point during the program sessions, I believed the coordinator's reflective report could add to or enhance my understanding of the communication that occurred between participating military connected students and the program coordinator's reflective learning of discussions concerning their planning meetings and previous three program sessions. Also, the coordinator's report helped to further my understanding and application concerning post-secondary military connected student career development policy covered in this study's introductory and final sections.

Sampling Scheme

Determining the study's participants and the decisions made in regard to internal sampling, as discussed by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), within this case involved my attempt to understand the military connected students' collective perspective as to how they perceive and respond to the program workshop session content and its benefit to them. Since being introduced into an existing, ongoing program already in progress (in between sessions 3 and 4), purposeful sampling, which is commonly used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014), was used. The program coordinator informed me that five military connected students had attended the first program session and approximately 20 military connected students had attended sessions two and three. After inquiring about program participant recruitment, the coordinator explained that the university knows of approximately three hundred to three hundred fifty military connected students on campus, and of this population, approximately seventy-five were involved with the campus' local student veteran Registered Student Organization (RSO), who are affiliated with the national charter of Student Veterans of America (SVA). The coordinator indicated that his recruitment process relied exclusively upon the local student veteran RSO/SVA and he indicated a possible attendance of anywhere between five and twenty campus military connected students for program sessions four and five. Concerning my identification of an interviewee, in terms of my study's internal sampling frame, I purposely recruited the student veteran RSO/SVA vice-president to participate in an informal conversational interview as explained by Patton (2002). The RSO/SVA vice-president was instrumental in collaborating with the program coordinator to develop the SVC DTP that was offered to her fellow university military connected students.

Data Collection

In an effort to understand the impacts that this program has had on military connected students, I gathered the following research data for this study: four participant observations, two direct observations, one participant interview, twelve participant surveys, and a reflective report from the program coordinator. By using multiple data collection methods, I am using triangulation, which according to Maxwell (2013), "Involves using different methods as a check on one another, seeing if methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion (p. 102)." Specifically, I used field notes as my primary method of data collection for both the participant observation role and the observer role, to include the interview for this study. Two documented direct observations consisted of observing participant non-verbal and verbal interactions during sessions four and five. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) indicate, "Field notes are written accounts of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (pp. 118-119). While the authors go on to explain that field notes are central to participant observation, "they can be an important supplement to other data-collecting

methods” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.119), such as direct observation and interviewing. The interview was conducted with a key leader of the university RSO/SVA. Additionally, the program coordinator developed a two-page reflective report on what he perceived as the program’s benefits to the participating student veteran toward enhancing their future career development. A final method of data collection was a seven-item questionnaire that contained both yes/no and open-ended questions that were dispersed to and collected from participants at the conclusion of program session four.

Data Analysis

An open coding and focal coding data analysis scheme, as offered by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), was used to develop what was interpreted to be categories, themes, or patterns from my field notes, survey data, the interview transcript, and the coordinator’s reflective report. Based on this analysis, various chunks of data contained particular thematic information, which I refer to as thematic units-of-analysis.

Study Findings

I established the study findings by discovering connections between the research question and the study’s data analysis plan, which was used to develop thematic units-of-analysis that stood out in the study’s data. “Career development,” “Veteran career adjustment,” “Overall student veteran satisfaction with program,” and “Student veteran program participation” emerged as the four thematic units of significance.

As initially stated, the focus of this study was to examine participating military connected student perspectives of the SVCDDTP in terms of how this program may enhance or improve their future employability. This section has three subsections that illustrate the interviewee perspective, the program coordinator perspective of his gained understanding regarding the strengths, needs, and challenges of participating military connected students pertaining to this post-secondary career development program, and my direct observations detailed in the student veteran subsection, which I finish by displaying their survey results. Table 1 visually connects this study’s data to the four thematic units of analysis, along with perspectives gathered from the key interviewee, program coordinator, and participating military connected students is included in this section. This study’s assumption is that participating military connected students will view this university sponsored veteran specific career services program in a positive manner toward improving their future employment preparedness and career goals.

Essentially, inductive reasoning was used to help develop my understanding of the “how” and “what” from the data sources to see if the study’s assumption was either supported or contradicted. Table 1 illustrates the conceptualization of this process in connecting the data sources and four thematic units-of-analysis to the research question and assertion via vignettes.

Table 1. Data Source and Thematic Units Vignette

Thematic units-of-analysis and data sources	Career development	Veteran career adjustment	Overall student veteran satisfaction with program	Student veteran program participation
Field observation notes	Observed seriousness in student veterans' discipline, tone & mood in both sessions.	Observed similar behaviors and actions learned as result of military during this program's session (Transition).	Observed several voiced "Thank you(s)" to university representatives at session four end.	The fact that this population's involvement in this program stands out to us.
Planning meeting notes	Coordinator understood from his work with the two RSO/SVA leaders how serious student veterans are in their career development.	Coordinator began working with other university agencies and two RSO/SVA leaders to establish this program.	Coordinator wanted to invite (military vets) employer recruiters to session four to increase student veteran satisfaction.	Coordinator was curious about what previously learned skills he had imparted would be used by participating student veterans in session five.
Student veteran survey	<u>How has this program benefitted you and in what ways?</u> "I have been able to fine tune my resume so effectively that I am preparing for ...interviews..."	<u>How has this program benefitted you and in what ways?</u> "It has given me some points along the journey to new grad employment."	<u>Would you recommend this program in the future to other university student veterans?</u> "Yes, beautiful info for veterans who need career assistance."	<u>Would you recommend this program in the future to other university student veterans?</u> "Definitely, yes. Awesome program! I learned a lot!"
Student veteran interview	She emphasized the need for university to expand or create outreach programs and opportunities for more student veteran involvement.	Including employer recruiter, who is a military veteran, in program session helps.	"The program was "awesome." This comment might be generalized to other student veterans- As she is a leader in RSO/SVA, this may be collective feedback.	Student veteran "adamant in attending their university classes." This comment may or may not be generalized to this program's similar importance.
Program designer reflection notes	Indicated an understanding of specific skills and relevant info by working with RSO/SVA leaders to strategically plan program content.	Coordinator began working with other university agencies and two RSO/SVA leaders to establish this program.	Including employer-recruiter in all of the program's sessions offered to student veterans.	Incorporating new university's Coordinator of the Office of Veteran Student Services to improve the marketability & participation to student veterans.

Note: This table provides vignettes used to support the assertion that participating military connected students will have a positive and beneficial perspective to this program enhancing their future employability.

Interviewee Perspective

When asked about her reaction to the workshop series, as per overall satisfaction with the program as a thematic unit, Sally (a pseudonym) stated,

It was awesome! It actually, I remembered when it started last year. I went to him [the program coordinator] and I said, "Hey, veterans are not going to the Career Center and it's a combination of trust, so what can we do to fix?" I definitely had the buy in. It was a good change because veterans felt that no one knew how to translate their military experience. It's one of the hardest things. From the stories that I heard in the past two years, before I became vice president, they had said, "I go there and I feel like they can't do nothing for me."

After being asked the follow-up question, "So I was under the impression that this program started this year." Sally responded,

It did start this year, but the conversation we had were all about coming up with ideas for this year. I liked the program! The best response I got asking the veterans around was when [the employer recruiter's name] came. He was from Rockwell Collins. He was the first presenter in the first series. He's a talker. Veterans have a certain type of apprehension, but when they found out that he's a veteran they trusted him and he knows exactly what's going on. He knows how to translate it and it made him feel very comfortable and they had a buy in.

Sally's statements allude to both her experience of feeling that the university's career center had not previously reached out to military connected students on campus specifically for such a career preparedness program, and her self-initiated involvement in working with the program's coordinator to make this inaugural program happen.

Regarding the thematic units of career development and veteran career adjustment, Sally stated that from her own experience, and from that of some of her military connected student colleagues, there is potential for the university's career center to offer similar career development-oriented seminars and workshops in the future that are specialized toward helping prepare military connected students for future employment in the civilian workplace. Specifically, she commented,

And then also I was realizing that there were student veterans who weren't, they came to college and they didn't know what is the building blocks I need to setup from day one as a freshman to make sure I can get a career. Those workshops definitely made sure to challenge veterans to start thinking about your career now. Not when you are a senior, not when you are a graduate, but the first day you come to campus.

Sally mentioned that a military connected student may initially have a difficult time attending the university due to perceived lack of support (to include veteran specific career development support), and lack of university network (or point-of-contact) to ask for and receive the campus supports, which help military connected students transition beyond their military experience into a civilian educational and future work experience. Sally makes this clear in the following interview excerpt,

Personally, currently where I am now, great. Starting out it was a struggle just because coming to [the university's name], it's such a big campus. You get lost in all of the branches that are out there and my experience, I think everyone's experience in the military is often times when you get to a location, your duty station, in this situation your campus. There's a person there that guides you and says, "OK" "Welcome to this place and here's your check list." And then you are good to go. When I got here, it was just kind of, you're a student veteran. You're not a traditional student so we're not going to make you take incoming course, but we don't know where you fit so good luck in figuring out how to navigate. Good luck you knowing you're supposed to meet

with your college advisor. You're supposed to meet with your major advisor and knowing where financial aid is. And took me a year and half and taking a year from school to figure out that system and I figured it out by finding that network of veterans who had been through the same experiences that I did and had to learn the hard way and then they said, "Hey! Here are the tricks. Here is what you suppose to do." Hence why I am in this position [an RSO/SVA leader] and I meant it because I'm trying to help incoming veterans avoid unnecessary difficulties and obstacles that myself and other veterans had to face.

Specifically, Sally pointed out that she found it helpful for this program to educate participating military connected students to translate their military experience into meaningful language (i.e., civilian resume development) geared toward seeking future civilian employment. She stated,

Things that I knew was good. Translating military skills and quantifying things, quantifying your skills. So because a lot of students realize that they have a quality like, "Oh yeah, I worked here." And putting a quantifiable measure to it that was something that student veterans started to come up to me and ask me about it. The resume. Not having one resume that fits all positions. Yeah, there's stuff that they just didn't know. Yeah, that's all I can think of. Overall the information was good, it's better than nothing, which is what the veterans were having before.

Regarding all four thematic units, Sally spoke to how the university needed to expand or create outreach events and opportunities to connect to and network with campus' military connected students for employment opportunities similar to this offered program. Furthermore, she suggested the university should initiate community outreach, to include the local community college, as well as local newspapers, which she felt was needed to market programs that offered similar program employability skills to military connected students within the community. Her point was that military connected students beyond those with a formal connection to the university, needed to be made aware of, and attend such programs. For example, Sally stated,

Coordinating with [a university official responsible for campus student veteran specific services] because he has the mass email to everyone and also possibly opening it up to [military connected students at a local community college]. There's a lot of veterans on campus that are making their initiatives to come to [the university], or at least have a variety of connections so I think that would also help get the word out. But I don't know if you just want to make this exclusive to just [university] student veterans only.

A second point that Sally found helpful toward all four thematic units was that the program coordinator had brought in a corporate recruiter during the first session to help illustrate the career development or adjustment skills being taught. This recruiter was also a U.S. military veteran, who was purposively brought in by the coordinator for this reason. The response from this action, according to Sally, was that it not only added to the overall program satisfaction of the five military connected students that attended session one, but also increased the five participants attending session one to approximately twenty participants for sessions two and three (corroborated in sampling scheme sub-section).

Additionally, Sally spoke about how military connected students were "adamant in attending their university classes," when she shared her thoughts on optimal timing on when such a career development program should be offered. Her quoted statement, when asked about possible schedule conflicts regarding low turnout for the various program sessions, suggests that military connected students are very serious about why they are in school and what they wish to aspire to afterward, such as future employment opportunities, which is why this statement shows a strong connection to

such thematic units as career development, veteran career adjustment, and student veteran program participation.

Program Coordinator Perspective

Similar to Sally, the coordinator had identified the need to meet stakeholders to establish career development and readiness programs on the university campus that were specific to the requirements and experiences of the military connected student. What was learned from his reflective report and from the planning meeting notes was how he started working with other university agencies, employment recruiters, and two key military connected student leaders of the local RSO/SVA, in order to plan for the logistics and operations of starting SVCDTP. Furthermore, his reflective report and from the planning meeting notes revealed that the coordinator understood how serious military connected students were in wanting to have career development and veteran career adjustment type of university services and supports made available to them. The program coordinator indicated a belief that this specific student population would take maximum advantage of these offered veterans' specific career services.

From the coordinator's reflective report and from my planning meeting notes, I understood the coordinator had worked with two key military connected student leaders of the local RSO/SVA in determining what specific career development, veteran career adjustment skills, and relevant information to provide to university military connected students. A quote taken from his written reflective report indicated, "The sessions were strategically planned to follow a natural flow within a student's professional development process for career preparation: resume writing, career fair prep and interview skills, employer panel, evaluating job offers, and finally, a student [veteran] to employer networking event" (Program Coordinator's written report, personal communication, April 2015). The program stakeholders' input, which included the military connected student participants, as well as the university agencies, was involved in planning these sessions.

When he could, the coordinator worked in potential employer recruiters during the five sessions, offered in a two-month time period, for the purpose of engaging military connected students to participate with the offered program. Concerning the involvement of employment recruiters, the coordinator made the following statement in his reflective report, "Including employers in the planning and execution of the content was seen as a positive to myself and to the [military connected] students." He made mention that he was able to successfully recruit at least one employer for each session except for one. His reflective report contained the following quote,

When content is delivered by [the university's career center] and a partnering recruiter, I feel the message is well received by the students. They learn how we as a campus stress factors of professional development situations, and then hearing the employer confirm and share personal experience helps solidify the importance of the topic (Program Coordinator's written report, personal communication, April 2015).

During the planning meetings it was clear that the program coordinator understood how valuable it was for military connected student participants to witness how a military veteran can succeed in the civilian workplace and then, potentially, return to recruit other military veterans for similar employment positions. Additionally, it should be noted that the coordinator's ability to recruit a U.S. military veteran as a corporate recruiter to help illustrate the instruction of career development or adjustment skills being taught for at least one of the sessions, was to the satisfaction of participating military connected students according to the interviewee.

This preceding sub-section's statements correspond to all four of my identified thematic units, to include overall student veteran satisfaction with program and student veteran program participation.

Finally, concerning the coordinator's written report and all four of my identified thematic units, I found that wants to:

- Change the program scheduling from the academic spring semester to fall semester, as companies begin campus recruitment during the fall semester
- Cater to student veterans' request for a change of time of day and location as to when to offer the individual sessions for the purpose of increasing their participation
- Incorporate an employment recruiter to partner for each of the program sessions
- Incorporate the (newly hired, full-time) university Coordinator of the Office of Veteran Student Services to further enhance marketability toward and the recruitment of the campus' student veterans to increase the program's attendance rates (Program Coordinator's written report, personal communication, April 2015).

Student Veteran Perspective

In this sub-section, I analyzed the data sources from the field notes of the two observed program sessions followed by military connected student questionnaire type surveys. For session four's material content, the coordinator taught the valuable and necessary skillset of how to negotiate a starting salary once the participating military connected students are close to graduation and are in the employment interviewing process. The participants listened with intensity to the content he delivered, which at first, consisted of a review of a previous session in which he had imparted employability skill sets of translating military employment jargon into recognized transferable civilian resume language. These presented skills and materials are relevant to thematic units of career development and veteran career adjustment.

Of interest was the intense concentration on the behalf of military connected students participating in session four. Almost collectively, students' eyes and attention rarely left the coordinator as he presented his career development materials to them. What was notable during session four was that none of the participants used their laptops, cellular phones, or other similar electronics, but instead were very focused on the coordinator and his presentation. The coordinator distributed PowerPoint note handouts for his presentation intended to allow participating military connected students to make notations on; however, their collective focus on him wherever he moved in the room was unwavering during the entire session. They rarely or sparsely used the PowerPoint handouts to write any notes on. These military connected students displayed a professional demeanor with proper body posture and intense concentration displayed toward the coordinator as he presented, which along with their interaction during the question-answer portion of this presentation, visually indicated their collective learned understanding of the delivered content. These behaviors are representative of the thematic units of overall student veteran satisfaction with program and student veteran program participation.

Another interesting finding observed during session four occurred when a student veteran RSO/SVA leader asked a series of reinforcing questions, as if on the behalf of her military connected student colleagues to the coordinator in order to ensure a clearer and more succinct delivery of the presentation material. This leader's intent suggested that she may have felt her colleagues would better understand what the coordinator was intending to share with them by having him restate the presented material in a different and reinforcing manner. In doing so, it appeared as if this leader was displaying leadership skills, most likely learned and displayed in her prior military experience; by wanting to ensure that the valuable material the coordinator had intended to share was presented to them in a more characteristic and effective manner similar to what each military connected student was used to receiving, it was likely similar to previous military learning cultural experiences. As

indicated in my field notes, the following was observed, “She spoke in a helpful, authoritative, and firm tone as if to add to [the coordinator’s] conversation in helping her fellow military connected students out.” These actions would fit into the overall student veteran satisfaction with program and student veteran program participation thematic units as she was trying to enhance her fellow military connected students’ participation and satisfaction regarding the session content being delivered to them.

Of significance concerning session four was the attendance of a university associate dean of students. At the conclusion of the session, he spoke briefly in an encouraging manner while providing career development friendly websites. It was apparent this action was appreciated by several of the participating military connected students, as they made it a point to thank both the coordinator and the associate dean with handshakes and verbal expressions of gratitude. It should be noted that as a result of previous military experience of the author, often times those in high leadership positions, making appearances during an event or activities is appreciated by those participating persons in a motivating and validating way. This event would be reflective of the thematic units of overall student veteran satisfaction with program and student veteran program participation.

Session five was a veteran specific pre-career fair event that allowed participating military connected students a “final dress rehearsal” designed for them to formally visit with and market themselves to several “military friendly” companies and organizations that traditionally recruit military veterans to hire for employment. This is indicative of the thematic units of career development and veteran career adjustment. The same intensive concentration displayed by student veterans during session four was exhibited during their one-to-one interactions with the various organizational or corporate recruiters, in that each of the observed military connected students displayed professional demeanor with good or proper body posture and pleasant conversation with the recruiter. Therefore, these behaviors are associated with the thematic units of overall student veteran satisfaction with program and student veteran program participation.

Additionally, it was noted during one of the planning sessions before session five, the coordinator made a comment in that he was “curious to see how many of the [military connected] students attending session five would incorporate the skills they developed throughout the first four sessions of the program series.” This comment demonstrates a credible need for the program logic and design to be considerate of evaluation and feedback necessary to amend future program material and skills content to better help military connected students in their career development and veteran career adjustment activities.

Survey question one, which read, “How has this program benefitted you and in what ways?” may have been leading, but it forced respondents to answer this posed open-ended question in their own words. There were twelve responses, all with a positive indication, with answers ranging from, “Great information” to “It has given me some points along the journey to new grad employment.” To “I have been able to fine-tune my resume so effectively that I am now preparing for final interviews at two companies.”

Survey question five was an either-or question that asked respondents, “Would you recommend this program in the future for other university student veterans? Yes or No, please explain why?” All twelve responses given were “Yes” with explanations given ranging from “Definitely yes. Awesome program! I learned a lot!” to “Beautiful info for vets who need career assistance.” To “I learned some extremely valuable tips with handling the job acquisition.” These survey responses are indicative of all four of the study’s thematic units; veteran career adjustment, career development, overall student veteran satisfaction with program, and student veteran program participation.

Discussion

This study's data suggests support towards my assumption in that participating post-secondary military connected students had a positive and beneficial perspective to the Student Veteran Career Development Transitional Program (SVCDDTP) in terms of it enhancing or improving their future employability.

The following numbered list reflects the various learning episodes and conclusions gleaned from this study. Based upon the three provided (and in some cases, overlapping) perspectives that were shared in the findings section, numbers one through four resulted from data provided by the interviewee; numbers four through seven resulted from data provided by my observations in the student veteran perspective section; and number eight resulted from data provided by the program coordinator and the interviewee.

1. Military connected students appreciate meaningful veteran career programming and services provided to them with their input. It is important for military connected students to have "a seat at the table," when it comes to having the post-secondary institution provide career services targeted to them as a campus sub-population, and prefer to have employers and institutional leadership involved in the delivery of veteran career programming and services offered to them.
2. Military connected students viewing other military veterans as corporate, business, or organizational recruiters and program session presentation participants, is seen as meaningful toward their own satisfaction and motivation in viewing themselves as being similarly successful in their chosen career fields.
3. The type of career development program similar to the SVCDDTP needs to be further enhanced and expanded in a community-wide type of initiative so university and local community college military connected students can be aware of and use the opportunities that may be provided by such a program.
4. There is an obvious seriousness, based on the individual's prior military service and experience, in which this military connected student population brings with them in their transition from their military employment to post-secondary experience to civilian employment. This was displayed by their positive verbal and non-verbal actions, behaviors, and attitudes that this type of population exhibited during the planning, execution, and afterward (e.g., based upon the key focal participant interviewee perspective) concerning this particular type of career development program offered to them and the interviewee statement of military connected students demanding post-secondary veteran career programming services to be offered.
5. The career development or career readiness material content offered to these military connected students should be created by receiving military connected students (i.e. intended audience members), or their campus student veteran RSO representative, and this material should be offered to them in a manner that is characteristic to how they have received prior organizational learning (consistent to that of their previous military classroom experiences), in order to enhance their current situational learning. By "current situational learning," the career development or readiness material presented should be broad enough to apply to all participating military connected students (e.g., dynamic civilian resume development which reflects the unique but often times overlooked work-oriented leadership, training, and situational experiences offered in all military branches regardless of job), but customizable based upon each military connected students' current post-secondary educational program, to include career goals and aspirations.

6. There should be a shared feedback loop added to the presented career development or preparedness material. This is to ensure the material is relevant to that participating group's needs in a manner that they can capture and learn from regarding material content, context, and its application potential. For example, military resume jargon changes over time, as does every other type of jargon's meaning, which needs to be updated or considered as to if, how, or when to use in a civilian oriented employment resume.
7. In addition to a feedback loop concerning presented career development or preparedness material (indicated in number six), there should also be some form of feedback involving the "payoffs" of how some of the military connected students who have previously participated in some or all of the program sessions, can inform the program coordinator of what has worked and what has not worked, in terms of them applying learned skills and information related to what this study explored regarding the thematic units of career development and veteran career adjustment activities. Ideally, this particular feedback would come from a post-secondary military connected student graduate, who has participated in a program with similar material content as the SVCDTP, and who has successfully transitioned into the civilian workforce.
8. Post-secondary military connected students may prefer to engage with successful prior military service officials (i.e., educators, employment representatives, post-secondary administrators), who share a similar sense of experience, identity, and purpose in being able to successfully transition from their military work experience possibly via higher education to the civilian workplace.

These recommendations are intended to add to the existing value of offered institutional veteran career programming and services (e.g., the SVCDTP) aimed at the career preparedness and career goals of participating military connected students in terms of enhancing or improving their future employability based upon their perspectives (triangulated by my observations and the coordinator's report). Existing literature supports many of these recommendations in the following examples.

CAEL recommends campus student veteran RSOs are used to help "career advisors choose educational programs that help veterans advance along career paths (CAEL, 2013, p.16)," as discussed in recommendations one and five. In an empirical study, authors indicated, "Survey respondents, along with group or workshop participants, could be recruited to provide feedback as part of a career-development focus group, further informing research and application for student veterans' career concerns" (Hayden et al., 2014), which aligns with recommendations six and seven.

Limitations

The qualitative character of this research means the results or findings "provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study" (Polit & Beck, 2010, p. 1452), and should not be intended to generalize from one large, public university to another. Additionally, it is important to understand that military connected students participating in this study come from varied and diverse military backgrounds, such that one participant may be a veteran who spent four years on active duty in the Navy, whereas another participant may be a currently serving Army reservist. Furthermore, aside from the differences in military gained skillsets and experiences for this study's participants, the same will be true regarding their ranges of university academic programs (e.g., engineering to teaching), which must be considered when the university offers various veteran career programming and services. This aspect should be considered because these military connected students will have different career goals, which need to be considered by institutional veteran career services when offering programming and events. This second limitation is mentioned because even though triangulation was used with the research

methods for this study, it is important for the reader to understand that a broader, rather than narrow, qualitative lens was necessary when attempting to examine this study's research question. A final identified limitation of this study is that I did not inquire about demographic data, to include age range, disability, race, gender, academic field of study, or employment potential information, from the participating military connected students, which would have provided me with data for which to compare to the BLS data that was introduced in the Background and Significance of the Problem section.

Implications for Future Research

In an attempt to connect this study's limitations to suggestions for further research, additional research is needed to understand how post-secondary institutional veteran career development programming and services may be beneficial and useful to military connected students across, small, medium, and large colleges and universities, as well as community college settings. Institutions should ask what veteran career programming and services are needed and for what reasons, based upon stakeholder input and feedback gained from planning, implementing, and evaluations of offered events and activities designed to enhance employability of military connected students. Research is necessary to assist higher education administrators and officials who are charged with providing veteran career programming and services, to better involve all stakeholders, to include employers and faculty, in the process of understanding what is relevant and meaningful regarding the curriculum and activities of such programming and services. Relatedly, a complex and essential question relevant to this study that all researchers ask, is how do we determine which stakeholders need to be included in this research, based upon their need and/or contribution potential concerning veteran career programming and services, and how do we recruit them? Finally, methods that account for the diversity and breadth of military work backgrounds and current academic programming for eventual transition of military connected students from military experience through higher education to meet career goals should be ensured by the researcher or research team. It would be interesting to understand this study's research question based upon research methodology that includes a quantitative or a quantitative and qualitative (mixed methods) inquiry design.

Conclusion

Although it can be viewed as similar, the purpose of this study was not to provide a program evaluation, but to examine military connected student perspectives in order to understand any professional development benefits gained by their participation with a large public university career center's initial veteran career development program called, the Student Veteran Career Development Transitional Program [(SVCDDTP)(a pseudonym)]. Based upon these perspectives and associated data, four thematic units were inductively discovered to support this study's assertion that this offered career development program was viewed as positive in helping the participating military connected students achieve their career goals. In an effort to respond to calls for policy action by researchers, such as Humensky, Jordan, Stroupe, and Hynes (2012), to strengthen the functional employability of veterans with effective and connected transitional career development programs, this study may be of benefit to all interested and concerned partners, such as higher education administrators, officials, and policy researchers, who may use this study's findings and recommendations in implementing respective practical applications of future similar programs (e.g., SVCDDTP) aimed at enhancing military connected student career development and career adjustment between the transition of military and civilian employment. An established feature of higher education career programming and services is to prepare students for successful employment post-

graduation. A specific feature of veteran career programming and services would be providing military veterans, who are transitioning through higher education, with career development skills that allow them to fully and effectively translate learned knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences (KSAE), gained from their military service with their academic KSAE gained, to potential employers in a way that employers can understand how this candidate would add to the performance and production of their hiring organizations. This feature is “above and beyond” the usual listing of the military service on an individual’s resume only. Research gleaned from survey respondents showed that the number one perceived career development need for an institution to remedy was, “Transferring skills gained in the military to the workplace” (Hayden et al., 2014). Building upon this study’s results and discussion, it is important for higher education organizations to provide applicable, well thought out, inclusive, veteran career programming and services to meet the career goals of participating military connected students as they transition from their military work experience through higher education toward the civilian workplace.

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