
RESEARCH

Transitioning from the Military to Higher Education: A Case Study of the Transition Assistance Program

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Joining the military can be an exciting and hopeful time for individuals looking to serve their country, embark on a new journey, and take advantage of professional and personal benefits the military offers. The military is an institution in which service members are trained in very specific skills, behaviors, and values. The training provides service members with the necessary operational, technical, and personal tools to operate within the military's institutional hierarchy. While transitioning in the military can be as much of a shock as transitioning out of the military, transitioning out of the military has not historically received as much attention. Zogas (2017) noted that "Young veterans regularly observe that the military does an extremely effective job of training them to operate within the military, and an extremely poor job of reversing that training or preparing them before sending them back into civilian life" (p. 1). For this reason, many veterans struggle as they transition out of the military. This study examines the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program (TAP) model utilized between 2014 to 2018, and in particular the training and processes designed to help service members pursue higher education, through a qualitative case study of one military Air Force Base. Four service members, three TAP Instructors, and one TAP Financial Counselor volunteered to participate in this study. Findings from interview questions, TAP and higher education track observations, and document reviews suggested that service members experience challenges during their transition but are better equipped to make informed decisions for their transition upon completing TAP.

Keywords: transition; service member; veteran; military culture

When the United States military conducted mandatory reductions in 1990, the Military Personnel Transition Assistance Act of 1990 was implemented, which required the creation of a program to assist all transitioning service members with separation from the military (The Official Website of Fort Knox Kentucky, 2017). At that time, each of the US military branches implemented their own version of the program, ensuring each requirement of the law was followed.

After the 1990 implementation of transition assistance programs in each military branch, the United States General Accounting Office (GAO), an independent, nonpartisan agency that works for Congress, examined its effectiveness and made five conclusions. The first conclusion was that not all eligible service members received transition assistance (Bascetta, 2002). The second conclusion was that the content and delivery of the transition assistance program in each military branch varied. The delivery of the TAP was found to be inconsistent among branches of the military from length of delivery to various locational settings (Bascetta, 2002; Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen, & Bailie, 2014).

The third conclusion was that service members stationed at remote locations separating from the military received modified, abbreviated, transition assistance through videotapes, workbooks, and distance counseling, based on the service members' unique circumstances (Bascetta, 2002; Faurer et al., 2014). The fourth conclusion identified qualitative data and studies to affirm service members' satisfaction with transition assistance. The fifth conclusion found that limited data was available regarding the overall effectiveness of the transition assistance program. Since 1990, improvements have been made addressing the five main conclusions found by the GAO.

In 2014, understanding how imperative it was to ensure a successful transition for service members and their families, the Department of Defense (DoD), along with partnering agencies, such as Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Labor (DOL), and the Small Business Administration (SBA), in conjunction with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and the Department of Education (ED), collaborated to implement a redesigned

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for the US military (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). While each military branch may still perform and title its own transition assistance initiatives for its separating military personnel, all branches are required to participate in and uphold the standards set in the redesigned TAP instituted in 2014 and lasting until 2018.

The redesign of the TAP in 2014, known as Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success), focused on enabling transitioning service members in building skills to meet career readiness standards by the DoD (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). It is important to note that after the conclusion of this research study in 2018, the DoD's Transition Assistance Program's GPS was updated. The TAP's 2019 updates will not be discussed in this case study.

The 2014 to 2018 Transition GPS training involved discussion of personal finances, family adjustments, VA benefits, mentorship, DOL employment workshops, resume writing, mock job interviews, job search practices, and social media utilization. Separating service members had additional 1- to 2-day voluntary training options, and they could choose from three different tracks: a) college-bound, which discussed financial aid and classroom adjustments; b) working, which focused on career technical training and certification information; and c) entrepreneurs, which provided small business startup guides (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.).

Service members separating from the military enter a phase of transition from military life to civilian life. This transition can be overwhelming for anyone who has served in the military and it signifies a major transition for their families. Leaving a structured and defined life and entering a life with greater autonomy and flexibility can be exciting yet stressful. Contemplating what the future holds is virtually unknown without guidance for thinking and identifying future goals and direction. It can be overwhelming for service members who choose to make the transition from a structured military environment to a college or university (Osborne, 2014).

Military life and civilian life have several differing aspects that contribute to making a service members' transition to college difficult. Higher education encourages student autonomy and working independently, whereas the military requires control over military personnel and focuses on collective efforts to accomplish goals (Naphan & Elliot, 2015). Many student veterans are anxious and lack confidence when starting a new chapter in their life involving a new mission outside of a military structure so familiar to them (Osborne, 2014; Steele, 2015). The military's TAP along with post-secondary institutions can lessen levels of anxiety by reinforcing a military-friendly institutional culture in higher education that regards student veterans with integrity, dignity, and honor (Jones, 2013; Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Osborne, 2014; Wilson, 2014).

In 2010, about 60% of student veterans were found to be first-generation college students (National Survey of Student

Engagement, 2010). The barriers that student veterans face, such as academic preparedness, confidence, understanding VA procedures, as well as combat-related and physical disabilities, can deter student veterans from being academically successful (Osborne, 2014). Ensuring the needs of service members are met is a practice the military TAP and institutions of higher education must continue to perfect. While this can be a challenge, institutional culture, support services, and resources within the military TAP and on higher education campuses can assist with ensuring the needed support is provided to service members.

Statement of Problem and Purpose

Prior to identifying post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a condition in 1980, service members participating in World War II (WWII) from 1939–1945 and the Vietnam War from 1955–1975, were sent home facing challenges they themselves and others were not prepared to support (Steele, 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Near the close of WWII in 1944, President Roosevelt signed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, better known as the GI Bill, which paved the way for the location of colleges and universities influencing who attended college (Adams, 2000).

The GI Bill of Rights encompassed federal subsidies that enabled service members and veterans to attend any institution of their choice contingent upon acceptance (Adams, 2000). This was the first push for institutions of higher education to accommodate the needs of service members and veterans. Rudolph (1962) and Kiester (1994) estimated that one-third of all service members returning from WWII, approximately 2.2 million, entered United States higher education institutions. The service members exiting WWII were taking advantage of the GI Bill benefits, and regardless of challenges, were looking at college as another mission to be accomplished, no matter how many challenges they faced (Kiester, 1994). Higher education administrators believed student veterans were ill-prepared for a post-secondary education and would fail decreasing the number of student veterans in higher education and returning back to the number of traditional college students (Kiester, 1994). WWII student veterans were home from war but continuing to fight a war within higher education to show they deserved to be educated (Kiester, 1994). Veterans exiting Vietnam and entering higher education faced some of the same challenges as WWII student veterans such as physical disabilities and lack of academic preparedness (Greenberg, 2008).

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the US had to again refocus its efforts on enhancing the benefits provided to service members. The Post 9/11 GI Bill was created to focus on new and revamped educational benefits for service members. The Post 9/11 GI Bill covers full tuition and fee costs for public institutions, and it provides a monthly housing allowance, books and supply stipends, college fund payments, and rural benefit payments for service members who have an honorable discharge and at least 90 days of aggregate service since September 10, 2001 (U.S.

Newswire, 2009). Due to the revamped post 9/11 GI Bill and the increased number of service members exiting the military, institutions of higher education were anticipating to experience an increase of as many as 2 million students (American Council on Education, 2008). More than 900,000 veterans and military service members received education benefits through the VA between 2000 and 2012 (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2014).

With the worldly, life-changing, and, in some cases, physically and mentally traumatic experiences service members faced during their military service, the military TAP along with institutions of higher education, must be prepared to assist service members in their transitions and reintegration into the civilian world. Financial, social, and academic challenges are the main concerns service members encounter within post-secondary institutions (Wilson, 2014). The examination of the training and processes of the TAP will provide the military, service members, researchers, and higher education practitioners with an understanding of the current assistance provided to service members pursuing higher education and could be used to improve transition policies and practices.

Research Questions

1. How does the military prepare a service member's transition to attend higher education when transitioning out of the military?
2. In what ways could the military improve the supports it provides to service members interested in pursuing higher education after their service?

Description of the Transition Assistance Program 2014 to 2018 Design

Military personnel separating from the military are required to attend a Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The purpose of the redesigned TAP, Transition GPS, was to prepare service members and their spouses for civilian life by providing information, tools, and training over a 5-day period, with additional days of optional training between 12 and 24 months, but no later than 90 days prior to separation from the military (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). Transition GPS consisted of an outcome-based core curriculum directly related to the Department of Defense's Career Readiness Standards (CRS) and individually chosen training module tracks. Pre-Separation Counseling was also an extended part of the Transition GPS process, occurring first prior to separation (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.).

The Transition GPS core curriculum was broken into six components: a) Resilient Transitions; b) Military Occupational Code (MOC) Crosswalk; c) Financial Planning for Transition; d) Veterans Affairs Benefits Briefings I and II; e) Department of Labor (DOL) Employment Workshop; and f) Individual Transition Plan (ITP) Review. Individually

chosen training tracks were broken into three components: a) college-bound track; b) working track; and c) entrepreneurs track. Once an Individual Transition Plan review, all core curriculum components, and optional training tracks were completed, service members' core curriculum completion was assessed through a mandatory Capstone evaluation that directly related to meeting the DoD's Career Readiness Standards. The Capstone evaluation determined a service member's preparedness for transition from military life to civilian life (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.).

Transition GPS was broken into three sessions. Two days were dedicated to resilient transitions, military occupational code crosswalk, financial planning for transition, veterans affairs benefits briefings I and II, and individual transition plan review while 3 days were dedicated to the DOL employment workshop (Careers for the Transitioning Military, 2018). Additional 1 or 2 training days were optional and were dedicated to the college-bound, working, and entrepreneurs tracks (Careers for the Transitioning Military, 2018). All three training tracks and all core curriculum components could be accessed through face-to-face classroom training. For service members unable to participate in face-to-face classroom training or who wish to access the curriculum at any time, a TAP Transition GPS virtual curriculum was offered. Pre-separation counseling and ITP review were the only two requirements not offered virtually.

GPS Core Curriculum and Training Tracks

Pre-Separation Counseling was mandatory and was conducted face-to-face. It provided an overview of the programs and services available throughout the transition process (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). During pre-separation counseling, a checklist was reviewed and completed. Trained TAP professionals provide in-depth counseling to service members allowing them to plan and prepare for their transition (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). During counseling with trained professionals, service members learn about the ITP, which assists them in determining plans toward future desired goals (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). The Resilient Transitions component focused on connecting service members with professional agencies based on support needs (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). Resilient Transitions covered stress management, considerations for families, support systems, and mentoring—all transition-related issues service members and their families may encounter (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). The MOC Crosswalk was utilized to translate military skills and training into civilian credentialing for civilian jobs and career goals (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). Service members were able to identify gaps in training that may exist between their current skills and the skills they need for their career goals. Financial Planning for Transition focused on providing service members with information and

tools to prepare for financial security when separating from the military. A 1-year post-separation budget considering their civilian life financial responsibilities, obligations, and goals encompassing future employment, education, and training plans was required from service members within Financial Planning for Transition (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.).

Eligible service members were required to attend Veteran Affairs Briefing I and II workshops that focused on disseminating information on available veterans' loan guaranty, insurance, and disability benefits and services, how to apply for veteran health and education benefits, and how to access and locate additional VA staff for assistance (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). The DOL Employment Workshop required mandatory attendance. The DOL Employment Workshop was a comprehensive 3-day workshop covering best practices in career development such as learning interview skills, building resumes, and using emerging technology (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). As the final component, the ITP Review required each service member to meet face-to-face and develop a step-by-step, individually tailored plan that assisted them in required actions to achieve their identified individual goals (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.).

Training Tracks

After completion of Transition GPS's core curriculum, including pre-separation counseling, separating service members had additional 1- to 2-day voluntary training options from which they could choose. Accessing College-Bound Track focused on assisting service members with the goal of attending a post-secondary institution after separating from the military. Within this track, service members identified educational and financial requirements that relate to their personal goals in addition to learning how to be academically successfully, and research, compare, and apply to higher education institutions (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). The Working Track or Career Technical Training Track provided guidance to service members to ensure they were able to complete applications, schedule and meet with training counselors, experts, and VA vocational education counselors as appropriate (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). The Entrepreneurship Track focused on service members pursuing self-employment. Whether in private or non-profit sectors, service members learn about entrepreneurship benefits, challenges, business ownership, and complete the development of a business feasibility plan (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.).

Methodology

Conceptual Framework

This study was framed on DiRamio and Jarvis's (2011) adapted version of Tinto's (1993) longitudinal model of insti-

tutional departure in order to assist in answering the two research questions. This model of student departure looked at a service member's transition from military life to higher education in the civilian life. DiRamio and Jarvis's adapted model (see **Figure 1**) mimicked Tinto's theory of individual departure from institutions of higher education as an interactive model used to describe the longitudinal process by which student veterans succeed and persist or depart from post-secondary institutions. The starting point in Tinto's (1993) model analyzed the environmental conditions within higher education through sequential processes that students encounter that influence the outcome of students' success: (a) pre-entry attributes: the skills and abilities, prior schooling, and family background students bring with them to the institution, (b) original goals/commitments: student initially has entering an institution, (c) institutional experiences: academic system through faculty and staff interaction and academic performance along with social experiences through extracurricular activities and peer group interactions, (d) integration: progression toward the academic system and social system, (e) reformulated goals/commitments: reassessment from initial entrance, and (f) outcome: persist or depart a post-secondary institution. DiRamio and Jarvis's (2011) revised model introduced three additional pre-entry attributes: (a) health concerns and physical disabilities; (b) psychological and adjustment difficulties; and (c) financial matters and further expand upon original goals/commitments, institutional experiences, and integration in relationship to potential effects felt by student veterans.

Veterans who may have undergone multiple deployments may have specific health concerns or physical disabilities that may affect their experiences within higher education. In addition, veterans who may have undergone multiple deployments may have psychological injuries, such as post-traumatic stress, that may affect their higher education experience. Financial matters could become a concern for student veterans when adjusting to the fact that direct military assistance with housing, childcare, and transportation was no longer available (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Further adaptation was seen within the goals and commitments stage in **Figure 1** surrounding student veterans' external commitments. In comparison to Tinto's (1993) model, DiRamio and Jarvis's (2011) outcome stage assessed student veterans' decision to depart as the driving forces behind the decision to persist.

DiRamio and Jarvis's (2011) adapted model was useful in analyzing student veterans' experience and potential for success when separating from the military and entering higher education. The strength of this revised model was in its initial foundation of Tinto's (1993) original theory of student departure and in its consideration of additional pre-entry attributes, goals, and external commitments. The six pre-entry attributes specifically focused on the factors that affected a service member's decision to attend higher education with the goals and external commitments stage

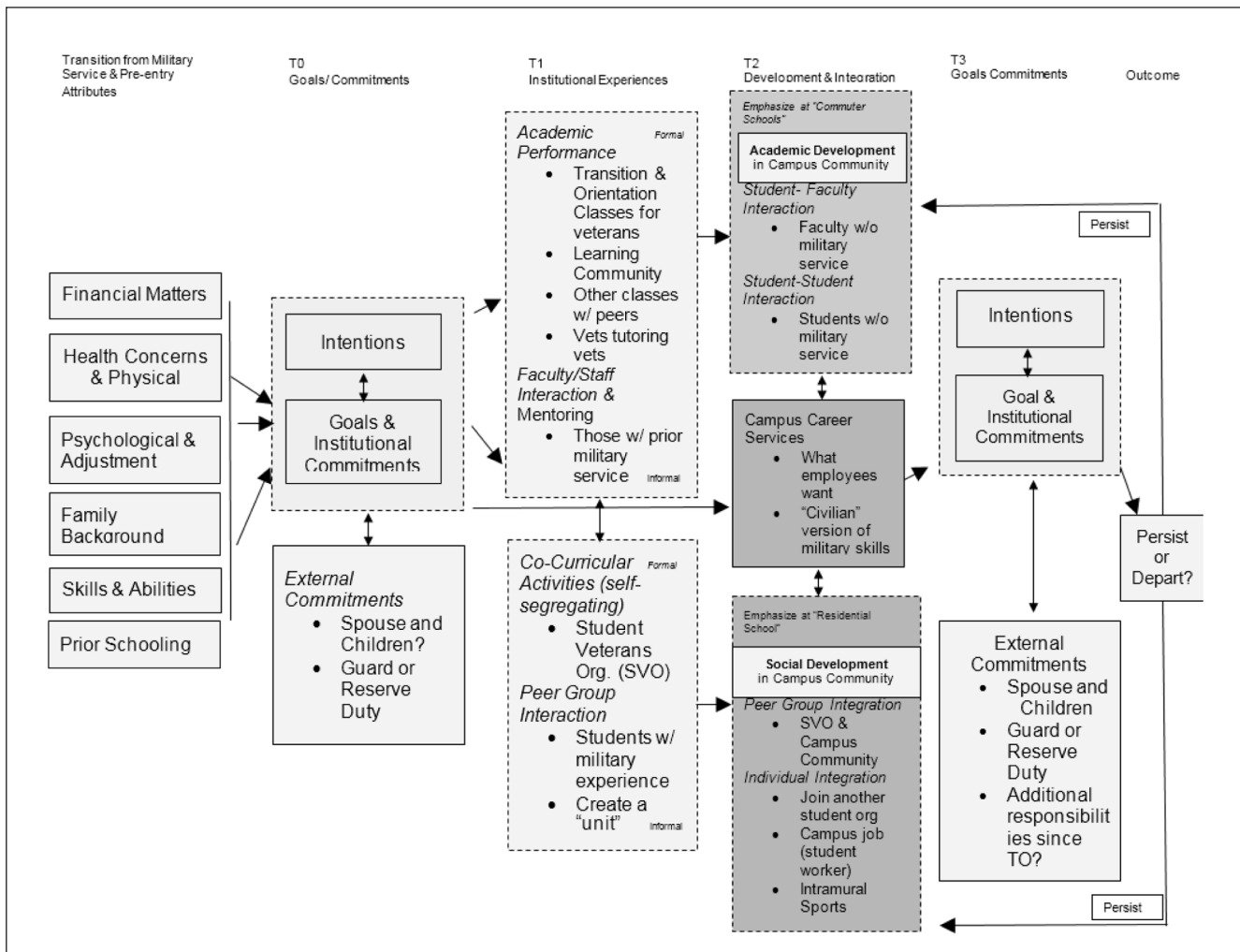


Figure 1: DiRamio and Jarvis's Adaptation of Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure for Student Veterans. *Note:* This figure demonstrates the elements of a student veteran flow chart following exiting the military and entering higher education.

contributing to a service member's decision to persist or depart.

Conversely, the strength of the initial foundation can be regarded as a weakness when considering Tinto's (1993) theory focused specifically on traditional-age students. By the nature of their prior life experiences, age, and time served in the military, student veterans are considered non-traditional students. (Hitt et al., 2015). Although DiRamio and Jarvis's (2011) framework was originally constructed focusing on traditional college students, their model is applicable to non-traditional students, specifically student veterans, in assessing their success or failure toward degree completion.

DiRamio and Jarvis's (2011) conceptual framework also assisted with identifying the resources and services that the TAP provided to service members through analyzing the service members' preparation for institutional experiences (T1) and development and integration (T2) experiences within higher education. Their model allowed for the discussion of prominent concerns faced by student veterans such as

financial matters, health concerns/physical disabilities, psychological adjustment, family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling to student veterans' transition from military service. Further, student veterans' goals and commitments, academic and social interactions/experiences, academic and social development within the campus environment, and reformulated goals and commitments, depicted a roadmap for assessment on a student veteran's transition into higher education, ultimately resulting in their outcome, persistence or departure.

This study primarily focused on the initial step provided to service members exiting the military: attending TAP, stressing the resources and guidance that assist service members with their transition to higher education. Although DiRamio and Jarvis's (2011) conceptual framework provided a theoretical understanding of the area's institutions must emphasize relating to student veterans support and their subsequent success, it did not address some of the roadblocks (i.e., resources, support services, personnel training) impeding

the implementation of support structures. However, their theory of individual departure did provide a conceptual framework describing a holistic approach for student veterans during their transition into higher education in order to persist and be successful.

Research Design

A case study research design was used to better understand what it was that I as the researcher perceived was happening in key testimonies and to represent those happenings with my own direct interpretation (Stake, 1995). The inquiry for this study consisted of both an intrinsic case study and instrumental case study. Through an intrinsic case study, I was more interested in learning about the military's transition assistance program and college-bound track as a particular case and less interested in a general problem (Stake, 1995). However, this case study can be viewed more as an instrumental case study, in that I wanted to better understand what resources, guidance, information, and tools were provided to service members during the 2014 to 2018 structured TAP and college-bound track, with less focus on understanding service members' TAP experience.

This single case study reviewed the TAP at one Air Force Base during one of the 5-day periods the TAP was administered. I emailed the Public Affairs Office at the Air Force Base requesting access to the TAP in order to conduct my research study. From Public Affairs, I was referred to discuss the details of my research study with the Airman Family and Readiness Center (AFRC) which housed the TAP. After speaking with the AFRC, a letter of cooperation for this study was approved by the AFRC, Public Affairs Office, Colonel of the Air Force Base, and provided to me. This case study was temporally bounded by the 5-day period during which the TAP was administered at the base and the 2-day period during which the college-bound training track was administered. At the Air Force Base, this case study research occurred during late September through October 2018.

Data Collection

Data was primarily from interviews, observations of the TAP training environments, and relevant documents to triangulate findings. Face-to-face interviews with service members and TAP associated individuals were conducted to gain insight on the perspectives of their experiences with the TAP and the college-bound track. Service members participating in and individuals associated with the TAP were the chosen population for this study. At the end of the first day of the TAP observations, four service members, three TAP Instructors, and one TAP Financial Counselor volunteered to participate in this study. Those individuals were sent a follow-up email requesting their voluntary participation in the study. The four service members were currently active duty and were retiring or separating from the military or were undecided on whether to separate, reenlist, or extend their service. Two service members participated in the higher education track program upon completion of the TAP; however,

one was interviewed prior to attending the higher education track and the other was interviewed after the completion of the first day of the higher education track. Of the eight participants, four were female and four were male. While I had initially hoped to secure 10 interview participants for this study, I felt the interviews with eight participants, TAP and higher education track observations, and TAP and higher education track documents provided a significant amount of data to answer my research questions.

Email correspondence was used to schedule and coordinate interviews, interview locations, and meeting times for data collection. Interviews occurred on base within the AFRC in a location designated by the AFRC. Each participant completed a consent form as well as a biographical data form that asked general information about demographics to preserve interview time for other questions. I used a semi-structured interview protocol. Interview questions were based upon the research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework. Data collection occurred over a 3-week period. Eight separate interviews took place lasting between 12 to 42 minutes. All participants participated in interviews prior to, during, or after their day's work schedule. All participants were asked the same 16 interview questions (see Appendix A). During each interview field notes were taken. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for data collection on a password secure application and laptop.

Observations of the Air Force Base's Education Building where the TAP and higher education track sessions were administered housed classrooms that held 20 to 25 individuals with the exception of the TAP classroom that held 40 to 45 individuals. Higher education admission representatives were also housed on the second floor of the Education Building with their own individual offices. Three circular tables with five chairs each were positioned directly in front of the TAP classroom. One table had check-in material for service members to sign upon entering the classroom. There was also additional sign-up information for the higher education, career technical, and entrepreneurship tracks.

The TAP classroom was large with five rows of seats with 32 service members in attendance. The front wall of the classroom had two dry erase boards and two projector screens with one projector hanging from the ceiling, all of which were used during the day's presentations. Between the dry erase boards, there was a bulletin board with job fair and career exploration information. The classroom atmosphere was relaxed with no assigned seats, most service members dressed down out of their military uniforms, most drinking coffee, eating a snack, or drinking a bottled drink. Most service members brought their own computers, pens, and military papers with only a small number of service members walking in the classroom with nothing. There was a continuous noise of jets flying, but service members did not seem to notice.

Down the hall from the TAP classroom on the opposite end of the higher education offices was the location for the

higher education optional training track. The room had 18 double-set computer tables and computers and comfortable cushioned chairs. The front wall of the classroom had two dry erase boards, one projector screen, and one projector hanging from the ceiling, all of which were used during presentations. The classroom atmosphere was relaxed with no assigned seats, all service members dressed down out of their military uniforms. All except one service member brought their own paper and writing utensil. There were nine service members registered for the class; however, only six attended. **Table 1** presents a demographic summary of the participants with pseudonyms provided by the participants.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

I deployed Miles and Huberman's (1994) systematic method of data reduction and analysis as my analytic strategy. Miles and Huberman's method consists of three parts: 1) data reduction; 2) data display; and 3) drawing/verifying conclusions. Editing and segmenting texts for quick reference was the beginning stage of data reduction. I used phrases and sentences as the unit of analysis in order to avoid over-decontextualizing the data.

Data reduction and data display occurred simultaneously during my analysis process. I created an excel spreadsheet with all 16 interview questions. Following, I added a "Codes" title to column B and "Text Segments" title to column C beside each interview question. Coding involved assigning codes and labels to segments of text (Yin, 2018). I placed all participants' comments from each transcribed interview question response into their corresponding text segment. I coded each participant's response for each interview question. With 16 questions and eight participants, every participant had a code for every question, creating 128 codes. I determined each interview question's final code by identifying reoccurring patterns in each individual code, ending with 16 final codes.

When drawing/verifying conclusions, I generated themes after grouping together and seeking relationships between themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Direct quotes from interviews were used to illustrate themes. I conducted two rounds of coding where I changed and/or confirmed codes from each participant's response to each question. Observations of the TAP and higher education track and documents were compared to the final question codes during both rounds of coding. Again, transcriptions of interviews, coding data, and all other case study information were housed electronically through a password-protected computer. Lastly, I identified commonalities/patterns between each question's final codes, TAP observations, higher education observations, and documents received. From there, I identified five main themes that answered the two research questions. **Table 2** represents examples of initial individual participants' codes, final question codes, and themes.

During data analysis triangulation protocols went "beyond simple repetition of data gathering to deliberate effort

to find the validity of data observed" (Stake, 1995, p. 109). Utilizing triangulation, specifically methodological triangulation with interviews, observations, and documents as one source of evidence for data collection assisted in trustworthiness. As previously noted, using multiple, not just single sources of evidence, and maintaining a chain of evidence were two data collection principles that improved the credibility of this study.

Findings and Connections to the Literature

The inductive and deductive coding process uncovered five themes related to how the military prepares service members transitioning out of the military to attend higher education: (a) military and service members prioritizing the seriousness of the TAP; (b) necessity of online resources and assessments for TAP and higher education track; (c) utility of MOC crosswalk and DOL employment workshop; (d) potential financial concerns when transitioning; and (e) better equipped to make informed decisions for transition.

Military and Service Members Prioritizing the Seriousness of TAP

The military made changes over the years to prioritize the importance of separating service members' attendance in the TAP. The 2014 to 2018 military TAP emphasized a time frame for when separating or retiring service members should attend the transition assistance program to begin preparing for their transition. In addition, the military implemented a set number of days in which service members must attend the TAP.

The findings pointed to three main ways the military prioritized the seriousness of the transition assistance program: 1) mandating attendance; 2) having a time frame for when separating and retiring service members are eligible to attend; and 3) enforcing a set number of required attendance days. The literature discussed that the United States General Accounting Office's (GAO) first conclusion of the TAP's effectiveness was that not all eligible service members received transition assistance (Bascetta, 2002). The GAO's evaluation showed the military's mission-related work continued to be the top priority, in some cases making it difficult for service members to be released from military duties to participate in the transition assistance program (Bascetta, 2002). The 2014 to 2018 TAP mandated all military personnel separating/retiring from the military attend a transition assistance program.

Interview responses affirmed the military's emphasis on the length of the TAP, the time period between the TAP and separation, and the time frame in which the TAP was accessed. All four service members attended a five-day TAP, with one service member, Sara, missing the last day due to a VA appointment. Understanding the seriousness of completing the five-day TAP, Sara knew she would be required to make up the day by sitting in on the last day of a separate TAP. Four service members and two veterans were between three and twelve months of separating/retiring when attending

Table 1: Participant Demographics.

Pseudonym	Sara	Donnie	Jaiden	Jaja	Kelly	Don	Missy	Ray
Level of education	BS, Mgmt, working on MBS Mgmt	Some college/HS diploma	AS Aviation maintenance, working on BS engineering	Associate's degree	BS	BAS	BA in education	Masters-counseling in human development
Family/relationship status	Single	Single	Married	Single/Engaged	Married	Married	Married	Married
Number of dependents	0	0	3	0	2	3	2	3
Branch of military	Service member, USAF	Service member, USAF	Service member, USAF	Service member, USAF	Military spouse, USAF	Veteran, USAF	Veteran, ARMY	Veteran, USAF
Military occupation	Active duty, airfield mgmt	Active duty, munitions	Active duty, tactical aircraft maintainer	Active duty, public health technician	Financial counselor	TAP instructor	TAP instructor	TAP instructor
Previous military occupation	N/A	N/A	Senior control crash recovery shift lead	N/A	N/A	First sgt life support	Army maintenance officer	Database manager
Years served in branch	11	19.8	19	5	2	27	4.5	30
rank	TSgt	TSgt (E-6)	TSgt (E-6)	Senior Airman	N/A	SMSgt	Captain	CMSgt (E-9)
Separatee or retiree	Undecided	Retiree	Retiree	Separatee	N/A	Retiree	Separatee	Retiree
Racial identity	African American/Asian	White	White	Hispanic	White	White	White	White
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male
socioeconomic status	Middle	Lower middle	Middle	Middle	Upper middle	Middle	Middle	Middle

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

Table 2: Example of Coding.

Initial Codes	Final Codes	Themes
1. Airmen and Family Readiness reached out to airman for TAP, Service member talked with supervisor and scheduling was approved	Beginning transitional thinking during TAP (which did have influence on potential for HE for some)	Military and Service Members Prioritizing the Seriousness of the TAP
2. Assessments offered during TAP after each session	All separatees and retirees completed assessments. In-house preseparation counseling assessments are administered	Necessity of Online Resources and Assessment for TAP and Higher Education Track
3. Without Master's degree would not feel prepared due to financial benefit difference from military to civilian life	Higher education as a goal upon separation	Utility of MOC Crosswalk and DOL Employment Workshop
4. MOC converted skills from military to civilian language, differences between military and civilian	Awareness of additional training track options, not required, deliverables must be met if track is chosen	Potential Financial Concerns When Transitioning

the TAP. One veteran, Don, a TAP Instructor, further confirmed the military's seriousness in service members being required to complete the proper steps of the TAP. Upon returning from a deployment, Don had already completed his preseparation counseling, step one, and transition assistance program five-day workshop, step two. However, Don's previous preseparation counseling had expired, having been 12 months or more since completion. Don's TAP workshop requirement was still within the 12-month period, so he was only required to complete another preseparation counseling session prior to Capstone completion.

Service members consistently mentioned the simplicity at which they were able to schedule time away from work to attend the TAP. As discussed in the literature, service members and TAP Instructors confirmed the number of days of their TAP, time period between their TAP and separation, and the time frame in which they were allowed to access the TAP. In addition, the TAP agenda displayed that the required TAP GPS core curriculum was being taught over a five-day period as discussed in the literature. Service members and one TAP Instructor also discussed the availability of the TAP's virtual curriculum (Careers for the Transitioning Military, 2018; Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.) for service members who may not be available to attend the TAP's face-to-face workshop, demonstrating the importance of participating in the transition assistance program regardless of location and scheduling conflicts.

While not all participants attended the 2014 to 2018 TAP, two TAP Instructors were able to highlight the changes the military had made to prioritize the seriousness of the TAP from not having a TAP, to having a 3-day TAP, to now having a 5-day TAP. During Ray's retiring from the military, the TAP was in existence for service members, but was only a three-day optional workshop. A three-day optional TAP was better than what Missy experienced, separating from the military without any transition assistance program or resources made available to her. These changes solidify improvements the military made in prioritizing the seriousness of the TAP and preparing service members for their transition. Data

found in interview responses and literature represents that the military has taken better steps in prioritizing the seriousness of every separating and retiring service members' completion of the appropriate steps within the TAP.

Necessity of Online Resources and Assessment for TAP and Higher Education Track

During my observations of the TAP and higher education track, internet access and online resources were a necessity in presenting material, submitting required assessments, and completing required activities. Online resources were imperative for instructors to present DoD TAP mandated information and for service members to successfully complete the TAP 5-day workshop and higher education track.

The importance of online resources during the TAP and higher education track was an obvious tool the military used when preparing service members for their transition. The topic can be broken down into three main points: 1) completion of required documents and activities; 2) presentation of materials; and 3) support resources after military separation. The literature presented the concern that, previously, limited data was available when assessing the military transition assistance program (Bascetta, 2002). The literature also discussed the US GAO's fifth conclusion of the TAP that limited data was available regarding the overall effectiveness of the TAP (Bascetta, 2002). Interviews confirmed that the DoD institutionalized an online evaluation method focusing on the effectiveness of the 2014 to 2018 TAP. All eight interview participants discussed their participation in online evaluation assessments as service members and/or asked to administer as TAP Instructors.

In order for the TAP Instructor, Financial Counselor, and Education Counselor to present material, they all had to follow a content-specific, DoD created PowerPoint presentation. During observations on the first day of the TAP and first day of the higher education track, over 20 websites and five documents requiring website access were used. Every presenter during the TAP and higher education track utilized at least one, most utilized two or more online websites

during their presentations. Every website reviewed had a specific purpose relating to the TAP GPS core curriculum or higher education track topic and was used to complete an activity relating to Capstone completion requirements.

While observations and documents showed that online websites, links, and activities were a critical instructional resource during the TAP and higher education track, there was limited virtual curriculum usage by service members and veterans. The literature stated that the 2014 to 2018 TAP virtual curriculum could be accessed by service members unable to participate in face-to-face classroom training or who wished to access the curriculum at any time (Careers for the Transitioning Military, 2018); however, the virtual curriculum would not replace classroom training (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). Face-to-face workshops were the initial method of administering the transition assistance program with the virtual curriculum training being used for specific circumstances. The virtual curriculum had not always been available to separating and retiring service members; however, technology has made this resource a possibility. With PowerPoint presentations being scripted and instructions for content delivery and evaluation assessments being mandated by the DoD, the necessity of online resources was the formulaic method for the completion of the 2014 to 2018 TAP's and higher education track's many steps and forms.

The online resources and the activity of accessing the online resources was a tool in itself by providing a reference for service members after exiting the military, as service members may still need assistance after exiting the military with finding a job, comparing careers, managing their budget, and researching higher education institutions. The online resources were available to service members to utilize for guidance once separated from the military, and the exercise helped them understand where to turn for resources. The online resources within the 2014 to 2018 TAP did not specifically contribute to answering research question one; however, the GI Bill content discussed may have influenced service members to begin thinking about pursuing higher education.

Utility of MOC Crosswalk and DOL Employment Workshop

The Military Occupational Code (MOC) Crosswalk component yielded much information with service members able to recall specific websites and activities relating to resources, instructions, and useful tools that made them more aware of what was needed in their transition preparation. The MOC Crosswalk's utility proved helpful in assisting service members with identifying future career options. Referring to the mynextmove.org website along with other MOC Crosswalk websites, service members explained how the websites assisted them in identifying jobs that would be the best fit to pursue with their future degree plan.

Service members found the TAP's MOC crosswalk and DOL employment workshop helpful with their transition

for career exploration. This theme is broken down into two main topics: 1) challenge of translating military occupations to civilian occupations; and 2) value of job searches, resume building, and interview preparation. While in the military, service members are trained for a specific military occupational specialty, stripping down their civilian mindset while becoming immersed in military culture (Ostrow, 2013). The review of literature discussed the various types of military occupational specialties and how those specialties focused solely on the military's mission, making it difficult to find equivalent civilian positions (American's Navy, n.d.; United States Coast Guard, 2017; Military Advantage, 2018; U.S. Air Force, n.d.; U.S. Army, 2014). The MOC crosswalk focused on finding equivalencies with service member's military occupational specialties and civilian careers. The utility of the MOC crosswalk and DOL employment workshop was the most influential content that interview participants felt prepared service members for their transition out of the military.

The DOL Employment Workshop allowed service members to prepare for civilian careers through resume writing, mock interviews, understanding interview attire, and job searches. Service members discussed how the resume building and mock interview activities influenced them to begin thinking about career preparation. Even though the DOL Employment Workshop is advertised as a requirement for all separating and retiring service members, one TAP Instructor discussed that service members retiring after 20 years, or if transitioning service members have a valid job offer, they could be exempt from the DOL Employment Workshop portion of the TAP. The MOC Crosswalk's and DOL Employment Workshop's utility was the most discussed topic when interview participants were asked to identify any information that stood out within the GPS core curriculum presented over the 5-day period.

Potential Financial Concerns when Transitioning

Two main topics emerged during TAP observations and student interviews within the theme of potential financial concerns when transitioning: 1) loss of income; and 2) budgeting plans for financial stability. Service members reiterated what the literature discussed as housing allowance, basic allowance for subsistence, and clothing allowance being provided to service members as additional financial support (Ostrow, 2013). Financial concerns regarding military installation activities and resources provided to service members at a discounted rate or at no cost were discussed within the TAP, during interviews, and in the literature as factors that affect a service members cost of living (Ostrow, 2013), with those same activities and resources increasing in cost in the civilian world. In addition, the TAP's Financial Planning observations revealed healthcare coverage cost concerns for separating service members and their family (Defense Health Agency, 2017; Ostrow, 2013), as retiring service members receive healthcare coverage for themselves and family.

Observations of the TAP's Financial Planning session showed the importance of financial budgeting. The literature discussed how the TAP's Financial Planning session required service members to create a one-year post-separation budget considering their civilian life financial responsibilities, obligations, and goals encompassing future employment, education, and training plans (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). However, my TAP observation of the Financial Planning session diverged from the literature with service members only being required to create and submit a one-month post-separation budget. The TAP Instructor discussed how the military decided in 2018 that a one-month budget plan was more realistic for service members to complete, being that they cannot predict what new financial matters they might encounter over a 12-month period. In addition, the TAP Instructor stated the completion of the one-year budget plan was very time consuming for service members to complete and TAP Counselors to review. Interview participants commented on their appreciation for the one-month budget plan. They felt it helped them prepare for financial stability when transitioning.

The Financial Counselor for the TAP's Financial Planning discussed how she assists service members one-on-one outside of the TAP with their monthly budget for transition, a career readiness deliverable for Capstone completion. Through her role, she accessed resources on websites supported by the DoD, such as the RMC calculator, cost of living comparison calculator, and tax calculator, in order to assist service members with credit and debt management, tax impacts on budgets, and cost of healthcare. Service members discussed how the Financial Planning portion, specifically the one-month budget preparation assignment of the TAP, made them think about the financial benefit differences between the military world and civilian world including insurance, cost of living, salary, and military allowances. In addition to potential financial concerns affecting separating service members, retiring service members also experienced similar financial concerns due to the desire to maintain their current lifestyle, requiring employment after military retirement.

One service member, Jaiden, discussed how budgeting for his future financial stability was a top priority for him, but he felt overwhelmed with the process. Creating an one-month budget was difficult for Jaiden because he planned to retire and move his family back to England. While Jaiden's financial needs are unique, he shared that the TAP's Financial Planning session did not cover international budgeting factors. Another service member, Jaja, discussed how the one-month budget plan helped her see the difference in the financial allowance support she received for housing and subsistence. She also stated how the educational benefit information assisted her in understanding what financial resources were available to her for her future higher education plans.

The literature also related to what service members discussed during interviews and what the Education Counselor

discussed during the higher education track observation about preparing for financial stability when pursuing higher education. Understanding that GI Bill benefits include a housing allowance, financial stipend for books and supplies, and tuition and fee payments (Gallagher, 2014) assisted service members with planning for financial budgeting. Lastly, the literature surrounding this study's conceptual framework described how financial instability was one of the main factors that contribute to student veterans' failure to persist in higher education (DiRamio and Jarvis, 2011).

Better Equipped to Make Informed Decisions for Transition

The final theme found from observations, documents, and interviews was the overall feeling of service members being better prepared to make informed decisions affecting their transition. Whether a service member's preparation involved securing employment or enrolling in higher education when transitioning out of the military, interview responses underscored service members' realization of the need of a higher education degree. This theme can be broken down in three main points: 1) cognizant of the civilian employment process; 2) understanding the higher education comparison process; and 3) grasping the higher education military credit equivalency process.

Service members felt their participation in the TAP's MOC crosswalk, DOL employment, and Financial Planning activities allowed them to learn and realize the steps they would need to take in order to search, apply, and prepare for civilian employment. Service members also discussed how prior to the TAP they were not aware of best practice interview preparation techniques such as resume writing, cover letter writing, and appropriate attire for interviews. This is probably because the military culture is all-inclusive, encompassing military required trainings, behaviors, and commitments (Greenberg, 2008; Kiester, 1994; Ostrow, 2013; Tomar & Stoffel, 2014), leaving behind expectations in the civilian world. TAP Instructors and the literature discussed the number of service members transitioning out of the military and the importance of those service members having the skills, resources, and goals to prepare for civilian life (Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center, n.d.).

Two service members who attended the five-day TAP and the 2-day higher education track, described the benefits of comparing colleges, accreditations, accessing Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) transcripts, and researching which colleges offered the best military educational benefits outside of the 911 GI bill and Montgomery GI bill. Jaiden was pursuing a bachelor's in electrical engineering and planned to continue his degree pursuits after retiring. The TAP and higher education track provided him with information that could positively affect him financially and made his decision to continue his bachelor's degree very obvious. Donnie knew he would need to pursue higher education after retiring but did not know which specific degree would best fit

his career interests. The TAP provided Donnie with resources to identify which degrees he would need. Interviews with service members showed that service members were able to articulate resources, guides, and tools in which they planned to use to achieve their future goals.

Observations of content within the higher education track's PowerPoint slides such as institutional culture, institutions with student veteran organizations, and institutional support personnel like Veteran Certifying Officials, directly relates to what was discussed in the literature (Barry et al., 2014; Callahan & Jarrat, 2014; O'Herrin, 2011) and confirms what service members stated prepared them for their transition to higher education. The literature also aligned with content provided to service members in the higher education track specifically focusing on the importance of understanding institutional culture, availability of veteran support services, options for GI Bill benefits, accessibility of veteran programs, and marketed military-friendly institutions (Barry et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2015; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Jones, 2013; Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Osborne, 2014; Smith-Osborne, 2012; Steele, 2015; Tomar & Stoffel, 2014; Wilson, 2014).

The third point discussed in interviews and throughout the literature was the transferability of military credit to higher education institutions. The literature described how higher education institutions have credit transfer policies in which they follow in order to evaluate and determine course equivalencies (DiPaolo, 2006). The American Council on Education's transfer guide was a resource Evans et al. (2015) and the higher education track's Education Counselor discussed as an equivalency guide higher education institutions used to determine college course equivalencies for military credits. Nathan and Elliott's (2015) study showed how students felt demoralized when their military accomplishments and credits were not evaluated as equivalent to college-level credit. The Education Counselor and one TAP Instructor echoed Osborne (2014) and Wilson's (2014) findings and argued that service members have accomplished a level of higher learning equivalent to the cognitive learning occurring in post-secondary institutions, representing an equivalency in military accomplishments to college credit.

In addition, observations of the higher education track showed the Education Counselor discussing the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) military transcript and its applicability to college course credits. The Educational Counselor provided service members documents illustrating instructions on how to retrieve their CCAF transcript along with other course credits earned during their military service such as College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) and Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) credits. The literature and responses from interview participants show how information provided to service members within the TAP and higher education track prepared service members to be better equipped when making informed decisions on their transition.

Discussion

Included in the discussion are connections to both the literature and the conceptual framework along with limitations and future research recommendations.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the military's 2014 to 2018 TAP's structure and guidance in preparing a service member's transition to attend higher education when transitioning out of the military. Additionally, I sought to better understand what resources, guidance, information, and tools were provided to service members during their participation in the TAP and attendance in the college-bound track. Through inductive and deductive coding, five themes emerged that suggest how the military prepares a service member's transition to attend higher education when transitioning out of the military, as well as what ways the military could improve the supports it provides to service members interested in pursuing higher education after their service.

Research Question One: Military's Preparation for Service Member's Transition

My first research question in this study asked: how does the military prepare a service member's transition to attend higher education when transitioning out of the military? Findings from this case study align and conflict, although rarely, with the literature. While not all service members transitioning plan to pursue higher education, the TAP's process and curriculum content proved to influence service members to consider higher education as a future goal. Findings also supported aspects of DiRamio and Jarvis's (2011) adaptation of Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure for Student Veterans.

Connections to Conceptual Framework

DiRamio and Jarvis's (2011) adapted version of Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure framework focused on student veterans entering higher education and the environmental conditions they encounter that influence their decision to persist or depart. The pre-entry attributes and original goals/commitments were the two stages of the model that most clearly relate to this case study's research on the military's preparation provided to service members when transitioning. With this case study's research, I was only aware of what resources, tools, and supports were provided to service members during their transition, potential goals of service members after completing the TAP, and what interview participants felt contributed to their preparation to transition; therefore, the remaining stages of the conceptual framework were not applicable during this case study. Future research on these or other service members' experiences during and after attending an institution of higher education could provide additional empirical evidence related to this model.

The pre-entry attributes of the conceptual framework were specifically focused on health concerns and physical disabilities, psychological and adjustment difficulties, financial matters, family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. While the literature supported the discussion of health concerns and physical disabilities service members had when exiting the military and entering higher education (Greenberg, 2008; Steele, 2015), interview participants solely focused on healthcare concerns when transitioning to the civilian world. Psychological and adjustment difficulties were not a topic within the interview questions. While discussed in the literature (Greenberg, 2008; Steele, 2015), they were not consciously discussed during interviews. This could be because service members had not officially transitioned out of the military yet and did not know what psychological and adjustment difficulties they may encounter.

As one of the framework's pre-entry attributes, prior schooling within the Air Force and outside of the Air Force was discussed during interviews, within the TAP, and during the higher education track. These discussions informed service members of the prior learning, course credit, and experiences they bring to higher education institutions. Skills and abilities, as pre-entry attributes in the framework, were also discussed during interviews, and specifically, during the DOL employment workshop. These discussions allowed service members to focus on their strengths and weaknesses in order to prepare for their future goals, potentially higher education. Family backgrounds were not specifically discussed during interviews or observations. However, one interview question did ask interview participants why they joined the military, with service members providing reasons that lead to that decision. These responses were not discussed in the findings as they did not directly contribute to answering the research questions. Interview participants discussed how the TAP covered topics to prepare service members for their transition in order to avoid transition obstacles. As one theme found in this case study, potential financial concerns when transitioning was discussed in the literature, during interviews, and directly relates to the conceptual framework. During interviews, service members discussed their financial concerns that affect their cost of living, healthcare, employment goals, and higher education goals. If service members are unable to maintain financial stability, they are less likely to succeed in higher education (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Gallagher, 2014). If a pre-entry attribute, such as financial instability, is attached to a service member, their focus will turn to financial survival instead of academic success, especially when external commitments exist as well.

Interview participants discussed their transition goals relative to employment, education, and family situation. This was also demonstrated during TAP activities. Service members discussed how their transition would affect their family's relocation, financial status, and healthcare coverage. All of these discussions are connected to the goals and commitments stage of the conceptual framework (DiRamio &

Jarvis, 2011). External commitments like children, spouse, relocation, finances, and employment can affect a student veteran's goals and commitments when attending an institution of higher education. Both the pre-entry attributes' and goals and commitments' stages of the conceptual framework contributed to this case study's research on how the military prepares a service member's transition to attend higher education when transitioning out of the military.

Research Question Two: Improving Supports and Higher Education

My second research question in this study asked: in what ways could the military improve the supports it provides to service members interested in pursuing higher education after their service? The findings from observations and interviews enabled me to identify areas in which there were limitations and make future recommendations to support service members interested in pursuing higher education after their service. Interview participants' responses to interview question 16 explicitly spoke to the type of changes, additional resources, and training they would like to make to the 2014 to 2018 TAP and higher education track to improve the transition assistance provided to service members. The following recommendations were identified prior to the military's 2019 and thereafter TAP and higher education track changes.

Additional Discussion of Higher Education Within the 2014 to 2018 Five-Day TAP

Regarding the military's 2014 to 2018 TAP, my first recommendation for how the military could improve the supports it provides to service members interested in higher education was by incorporating at least a 30 minute time slot during which the Education Counselor of the higher education track would speak to TAP service members during one of the 5 workshop days. Regarding the TAP, service members did not feel the TAP's core curriculum directly provided support to their preparation to attend higher education. Three service members, Don, Jaja, and Sara all shared how they felt the TAP should offer more discussion about higher education. They felt adding these discussions would allow service members the opportunity to begin thinking about higher education as a viable option when transitioning out of the military.

Observation of the first day of the TAP showed a brief overview of the three optional training tracks in which service members could attend prior to exiting the military. The lack of higher education information discussed during the TAP observations proved that additional information, supports, and time could be provided to service members who are interested in learning more about higher education. Higher education was only deeply discussed as part of an optional workshop, which reduced the potential of the TAP to teach service members about opportunities available to them through higher education.

Better Integration of Individual Transition Plan

My second recommendation for how the military could improve the supports it provided to service members in the 2014 to 2018 TAP, was by requiring TAP Instructors and individuals from the DOL and VA to discuss the 30-page ITP document with service members during each relevant core curriculum session. This would enable service members to understand exactly how the activities they completed related to the requirements of their ITP. In addition, if a service member plans to pursue higher education after exiting the military, TAP Instructors and the higher education track's Education Counselor should review the higher education track's ITP requirements. This recommendation would provide more clarity to a service member's transition and future plans.

Through interviews and observations, I heard substantial discussion about the ITP; however, content discussed was never tangibly accessed within the 30-page ITP document. Within the 2014 to 2018 TAP, the ITP was the final component within the Transition GPS core curriculum. During the ITP review, service members met face-to-face and developed a step-by-step, individually tailored, plan that assisted them in required actions to achieve their identified individual goals (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.). Through the ITP, service members were required to show proof of their preparedness for transition from military to civilian life by completion of required documents and activities (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, n.d.).

After reviewing the ITP document and hearing Instructors refer to completing certain activities required within the ITP, it seemed unrealistic for service members to remember all of the specific requirements. During the TAP, service members did complete many of the required ITP activities; however, additional required activities would materialize once a service member answered ITP questions relating to their future transition plans.

Excessive Forms

My third recommendation involved analyzing the need for the multitude of forms. Although technology has assisted with TAP instruction, delivery, and activities, the ITP still required service members to submit tangible, hard copies in response to specific activity related questions. While steps and forms may be the foundation of the military's processing system, analyzing the limitations of the multitude of forms within the three step TAP could bring light to inefficiencies. Examples of inefficiencies could be taking time away from educationally productive content, substantial cost, and unpurposeful or duplicate information being collected.

Creation of Outreach Support Service

My fourth recommendation for how the military could improve the supports it provides to service members was by implementing an ITP follow-up related outreach support

service for recently transitioned veterans. Don's response to interview question 16 discussed implementing an employment related support service for service members exiting the military. He recommended that outreach from their previous military installation be provided to service members once they have spent a few months in the civilian world. This type of outreach could also be provided to service members planning to pursue higher education. The outreach would involve contacting service members to see how their pursuits were going. If concerns were made, Don suggested a job fair be implemented specifically for those veterans to attend having experienced the civilian world. At that time, those veterans may have encountered obstacles that changed their transition plans. Understandably, those veterans may not be residing near their previous military installation. Thus, implementing job fairs targeting recently transitioned veterans must be available on every military installation and connected with the transition assistance program. This recommendation could assist transitioned service members with employment opportunities, support resources, and realigning their efforts for higher education.

Individualized Financial Assistance

Lastly, my fifth recommendation was by service members being required to attend a one-on-one financial planning session during which they would review their one-month budget with a financial counselor. The TAP's financial planning session enabled service members to analyze their current finances and plan for future financial goals. The TAP's financial planning session occurred within a classroom among 25 to 30 other service members. The Financial Counselor discussed how service members were less likely to speak about their financial concerns in a group setting and more likely to speak openly during a one-on-one session. With the TAP's financial planning session being the only required financial session service members must attend, it is important for service members to feel confident about their future financial plans.

Conclusion

Leaving a structured, all-inclusive, environment only to enter a world full of choices and ambiguity can be overwhelming for service members. Service members who separate or retire from the military enter a phase of transition from the military to the civilian world. A mandatory transition assistance program encompassing three steps and a 5-day workshop was provided to service members through the military. Though the TAP workshop was only one step of service members' transition to becoming a veteran, it is a critical piece to their future success.

Higher education institutions can benefit from the research gathered within this case study to better prepare and support service members attending their institutions. With a better understanding of the pre-entry attributes service members bring with them to higher education institutions, institutions can better prepare to assist

service members in accomplishing their academic goals. There is a deficit on past research on the military's TAP, and this study sought to add to the literature by providing a case study that analyzed the 2014 to 2018 TAP at one military installation. Knowing the discipline and effort it takes to become immersed in military culture, service members must have the resources and support to enable their successful transition in becoming immersed in the civilian world. It is important to know what resources, guidance, information, and tools are provided to service members during their participation in the TAP and higher education track. This work is small in the big picture of service members' transition out of the military, but important nonetheless.

Additional File

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendix A.** Interview Questions: Military's Transition Assistance Program. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v6i2.178.s1>

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Ziencik, C. (2020). Transitioning from the Military to Higher Education: A Case Study of the Transition Assistance Program. *Journal of Veterans Studies*, 6(2), pp. 30–45. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v6i2.178>

Submitted: 14 April 2020

Accepted: 14 August 2020

Published: 01 October 2020

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